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PLAYSTATION® 3

PlayStation® Official Magazine - UK

**24-hour
gaming
madness**

Why our epic
online marathon
ended in tears



**The weird mystery
hidden inside Home**

David Jaffe talks gore
in God Of War III

**Call Of Duty: Modern
Warfare 2 wishlist**

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BIO SHOCK
She ain't heavy, she's my sister

FFXIII PLAYTEST YAKUZA 3



THE SABOTEUR WHEELMAN



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Welcome



Despite the sadness of it coming out on Xbox 360 first, and a typically weird internet backlash against it racking up so many perfect scores, when the original Bioshock finally appeared on PS3 we saw it for what it was. An instant classic. In terms of art design, player freedom and gripping storytelling, there are very few games this generation that come close.

So when we were offered the scoop on the sequel, which it should be noted is coming out simultaneously on all formats, we clambered hurriedly back into the diving suit. Rather than a by-the-numbers follow-up, Bioshock is crammed with intriguing ideas of its own. Submerge yourself on page 56.

The other big story is our attempt to have the entire team play online solidly for 24 hours (barring the occasional break for sandwiches and tears). Read the bitter recriminations from page 70, but just to be absolutely clear: do not try this at home. Fearful of being struck off, the doctors we contacted all refused to offer any advice other than 'don't do it you idiots'. But when's being told expressly not to do something ever stopped us?

Tim Clark
Editor-in-chief
tim.clark@futurenet.com

COVER FEATURE

56

BIOSHOCK 2

Welcome to the (little) sisterhood.

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See page 54

FEATURES



82 LIGHTNING STRIKE

Hang on to your oversized sword – we've got the first ever playtest with Final Fantasy XIII.



68 IN THE MOOD FOR... MUSICIANS

Dante, Parappa and Yuna perform in our Top Of The Pops PlayStation special. Groupies not included...



70 24 HOURS ON PSN

What we played, what we said, what we ate, and why we'll never do it again.

THE BIG 10 STORIES

Strange Goings	
On In Home...	12
Ninja Gaiden Sigma II's	
Lack Of Subtlety	14
OPM's Online Arrival	16
PlayStation Posers	17
Jaffe On Gore In GOW III	18
From Turismo To The Track	20
The Secret Costumes	
To Sex Up Sheva	21
What You Want In	
COD Modern Warfare 2	22
Gaming Comes	
Under Attack Again	24
Were We Wrong	
About Saints Row 2?	26

AGENDA

Informer	30
Finding the perfect Street Fighter stick.	
Culture	32
The LittleBigPlanet video you have to see.	
Personal	34
Settling scores with a plastic guitar.	
Tech	35
Beautiful blooms picked from the gadget field.	
Sony	36
Small and sexy, meet the Kylie of netbooks.	
Events	38
Vin Diesel wants to help you win an HDTV!	

PREVIEWS

Batman: Arkham Asylum	42
UFC 2009: Undisputed	46



92 YAKUZA 3

Juggle organised crime and orphanage management in the Japanese GTA.



104 WHEELMAN

Vin Diesel goes for a weekend break in Barcelona and totally trashes the place.



94 THE GODFATHER II

The Fredo of sandbox crime games gets to enjoy its fishing trip, second time around.

Motorstorm: Arctic Edge	47
Army Of Two: The 40th Day	48
The Saboteur	50
The Latest On...	52

FEATURES

The Sisters Of Mercy	56
It's back to Rapture with Bioshock 2.	
In The Mood For... Musicians	68
"Good evening, PlayStation 3!"	
24 Hours On PSN	70
No sleep, no work, only games.	
Lightning Strike	82
The first hands-on with Final Fantasy XIII.	

REVIEWS

Yakuza 3	92
The Godfather II	94
Ragdoll Kung Fu: Fists Of Plastic	96
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3	97
Disgaea 3: Absence Of Justice	98
SingStar Queen	99
MLB Front Office Manager	99
Mytrian Wars	99

Persona 4	100
WWE Legends	
Of Wrestlemania	101
Eat Lead: The Return	
Of Matt Hazard	102
Watchmen: The End Is Nigh	103
Wheelman	104
Wanted: Weapons Of Fate	105
MLB 09: The Show	106
Online: Mirror's Edge	108

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Who we are...

Tim Clark Editor-in-chief

Said he felt "overwhelmed by sadness, like his body had been soaked in tears". Arsenal drawn again?

Game of the month
Street Fighter IV
Twitter handle
timothydclark

Leon Hurley Commissioning editor

Now has to feed his cat powdered unicorn horns or it stages a dirty protest.

Game of the month
Killzone 2
Twitter handle
leonHurley

Nathan Ditum Reviews editor

Deliberately left MGS4 at work just so he wouldn't have to play it during our 24hr marathon. Booooo!

Game of the month
Noby Noby Boy
Twitter handle
NathanDitum

Ben Wilson Deputy editor

Finally shaved off his wild man of games beard after terrifying the natives while roaming around Tokyo.

Game of the month
MLB 09: The Show
Twitter handle
IAmPanthro

Rachel Penny News editor

Responded to the news that iPhone is getting cut/paste functionality by firing her Kalashnikov wildly in the air.

Game of the month
Resident Evil 5
Twitter handle
cupcake_rachel

Helen Woodey Operations editor

Broke with over seven years' convention by making Tim a cup of tea. It's some indication of how tough the issue was.

Game of the month
SingStar Queen
Twitter handle
You're joking, right?

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XBOX 360



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On your disc



Strap yourself in and prepare for blast-off, because this month's demos aren't just good, they're out of this world. Prepare to land on planet Helghan in Killzone 2, an intergalactic hellhole teeming with really grumpy mutants.

And hang on to your helmet, because the FEAR 2 Project Origin galaxy isn't any friendlier, as you deal with the aftermath of Alma's world-ending tantrum. If you prefer g-force to gore, you can get your kicks with Tom Clancy's HAWX, a riot of fighter jets and macho banter. Still not ready to disembark? Try our selection of 11 stellar demos, hand-picked from the archives.

Rachel Penny Agenda editor



This month's exclusive highlights...



FEAR 2 Project Origin

Time away hasn't made little Alma any less crazy, but try to keep your upper lip stiff in this horror shooter.



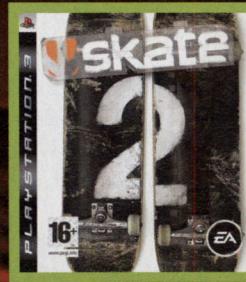
Tom Clancy's HAWX

Take your combat skills to the skies in futuristic jet planes. And by futuristic we mean 'laden with more missiles than seems feasible'.



Dead Space

Dismemberment by engineering laser. It might be messy, but when it comes to battling mutant aliens in zero-g, it's our new go-to tactic.



Skate 2

Grind, nollie and shatter your beautiful spine in a ten-minute demo that lets you build your own sk8r boi and explore Slappy's park on your board.



Killzone 2

The sci-fi shooter that's as brutal as it is beautiful. Learn how to handle your weapons, then put your mutant-slaughtering skills into practice by gunning down the deadly Helghast across two sections of Killzone 2's Corinth River level.

Also on the disc this month **Playable** Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway, Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots, Bioshock, The Lord Of The Rings: Conquest, Sonic Unleashed, Motorstorm: Pacific Rift, Mercenaries 2: World In Flames, NHL 09, NBA Live 09 **Video** Final Fantasy XIII, Tekken 6

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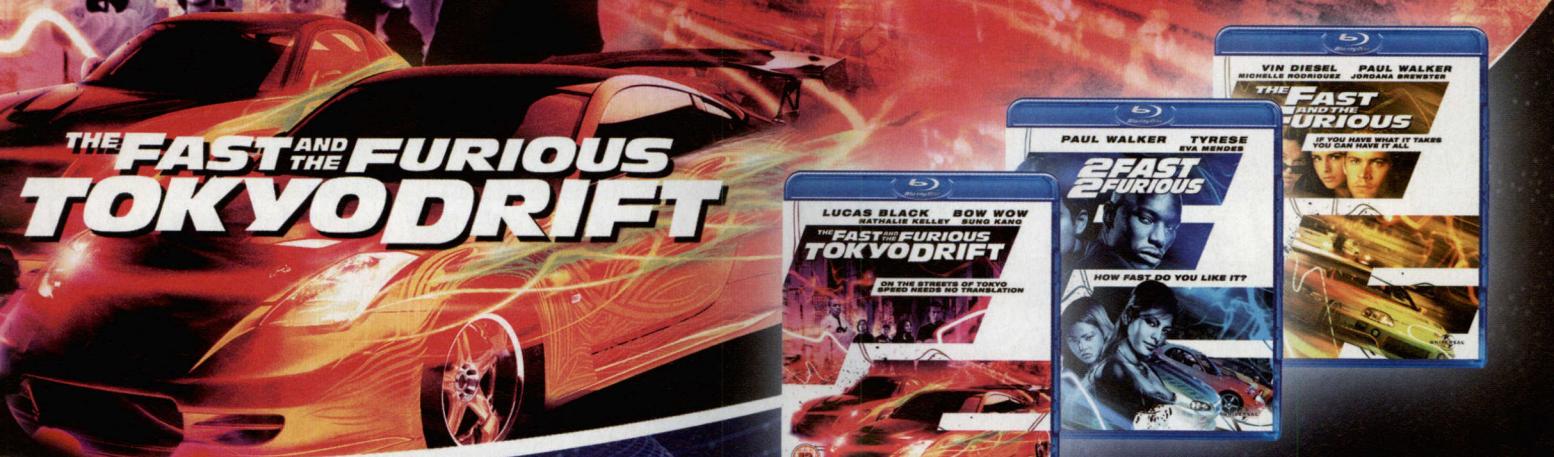


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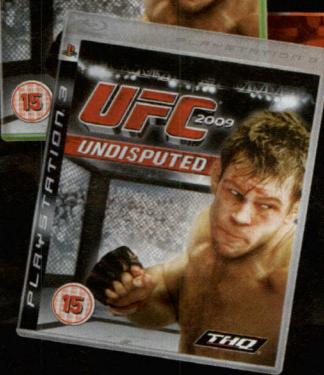
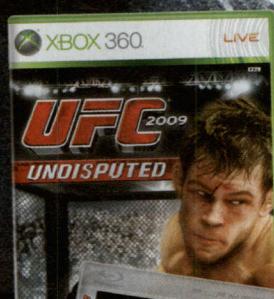
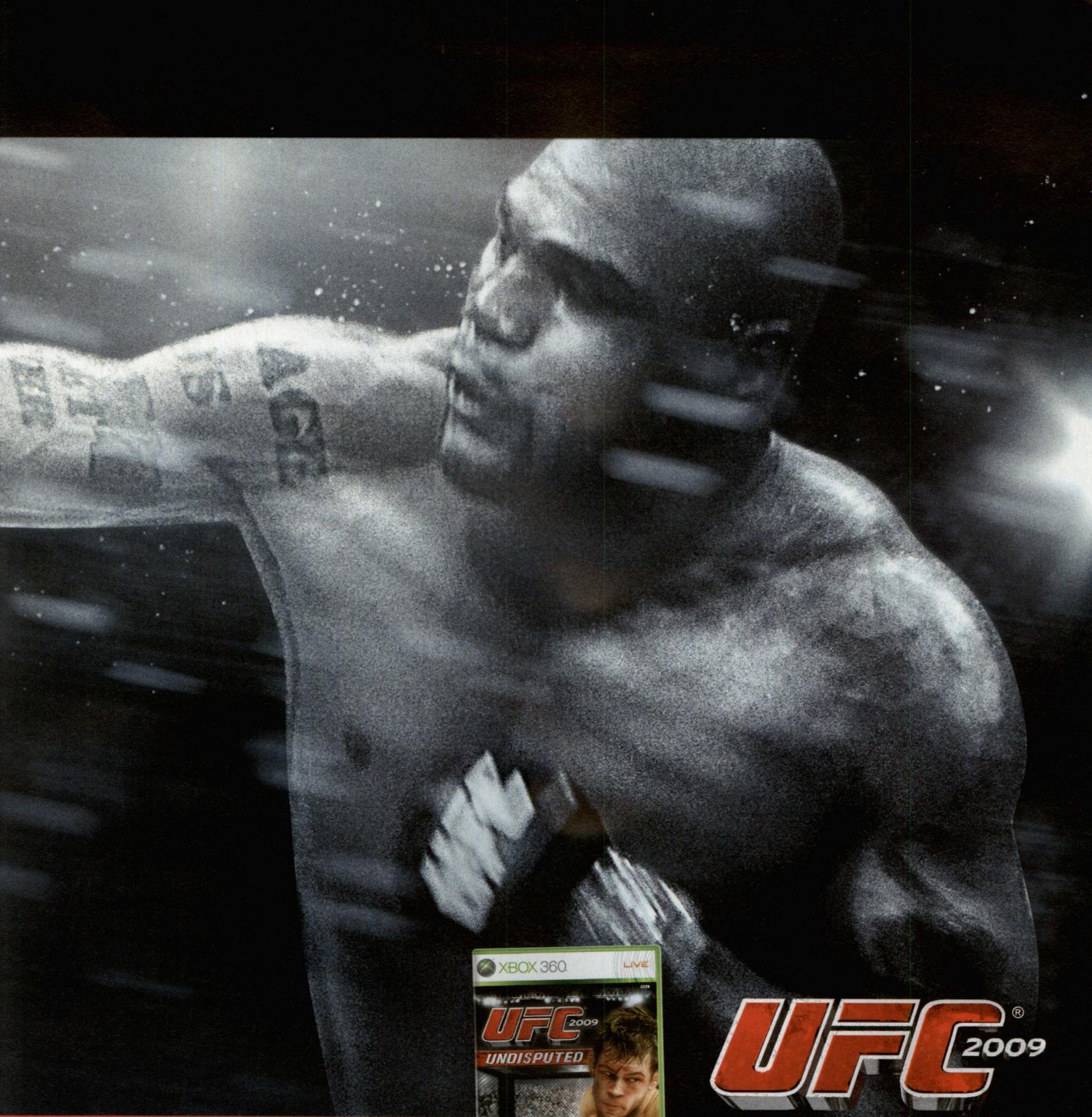
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XBOX 360

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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about...

Good to see Ryu

Ninja Gaiden II belatedly slices its way onto PS3.

► Page 14

Snap happy

The many faces of PlayStation.

► Page 17



God botherer

David Jaffe talks God Of War III.

► Page 18



Boy racer

Teen goes from Turismo to the track.

► Page 20



Debate

Were we wrong about Saints Row 2?

► Page 26



1 Strange goings on in Home...

...and how this woman is key to the mysterious new game, Xi

Welcome to Xi, the world's first alternate reality game based in a virtual world, and the biggest thing to happen in Home since its launch late last year. The game is based around the mystery of a missing software tester, Jess, and you'll have to complete challenges, solve riddles, visit blogs, work together with other Home users and even venture out into the real world to solve it. Billboards have already appeared in London, Birmingham, Spain, Italy and Germany, containing vital clues, and even bigger events are planned for the near future.



The plot thickens

Whether you follow the twisting plot or just the free mini-games like bike racing, 2D arcades and old-skool text adventures, something new is added every weekday so it's worth logging in. It might be a new clue, or a whole new corner of Home to explore, such as the world's secret maintenance

area. Well, someone has to keep all that virtual grass neatly trimmed.

If you've missed out so far all you need to do is go into Home, then head to the graffiti on the wall between the waterfall and shopping centre entrance and press **X** to enter the Xi hub. The notice boards and video screens there will get you up to speed quickly and you'll have instant access to new areas like the Alpha Zones – halls packed with games. As you complete challenges and stour emerging blogs and websites – like Jess's remote desktop (where you can search her folders, recycling bin and instant messenger) – you'll find clues and all important fragments. These are pieces of the mysterious code that Jess was working on. Collect them all and you will learn what exactly Xi is, and why Jess has disappeared. And look for more secrets to be revealed very shortly.

Find out more at jess247.com, or at the blog of her fellow software tester, Miguel, at cafemiguel.com.



Reality bites

David Varela, producer at Xi's developer inDreams, previously worked on one of the most well known 'alternate reality' games, *Perplex City*. Like *Xi* it grew across text messages, blogs, phone calls, emails and websites, but lasted 18 months and ended with a £100,000 reward. By its climax the plot had incorporated treasure hunts across London, a CD release, a plane flying over Manchester trailing a clue-bearing banner and even led to a group of players writing a book based on one of the fictional characters in the game.



■ Jess is the woman at the centre of the Home-based mystery, *Xi*. By the time you read this, clues will already have led someone to locate a USB stick taped under the bench she's sitting on in this photo.



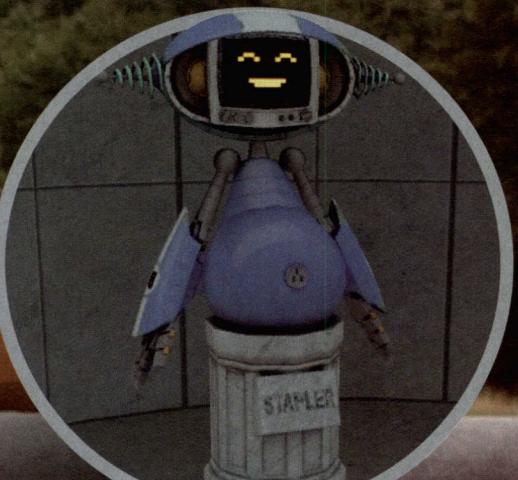
A home from Home

Spend a little time exploring Sony's virtual world and you'll find whole new areas filled with clues, games and people. Plus, more twists will be added to *Xi* in the weeks and months ahead.



Mini-game madness

The Rejected mini-game, complete with cow-catching farmer, is one of six games to be found in the Hexapolis challenge in the Alpha Zones. To win you have to complete all six within the time limit.



The robo-riddler

Stapler is a friend for hardcore gamers. Go to him when you've completed the standard puzzles for tougher challenges. Be warned though, it seems as though he's developing a personality.



The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about



2

Ninja Gaiden Sigma II's lack of subtlety

But can it carve up God Of War III?

Armless fun

The key selling point of Ninja Gaiden II was its brutal combat system, which enabled you to hack limbs off your enemies. Opponents wounded in such a way would either be weaker (obviously) or slower (even more obviously) depending on whether they'd lost an arm or a leg. Some would even attempt to mount a suicide attack, using an explosive shuriken to blow themselves up while holding Ryu down.

The boys at Tecmo's Team Ninja are a notoriously competitive bunch, so when word broke that God Of War III would feature 'zipper' technology that made a downed centaur's guts unspool like mangled cassette tape, they probably considered it a challenge. How else, other than the expiration of a timed Xbox 360 exclusive, to explain why Ninja Gaiden Sigma II has been confirmed for PS3?

This won't just be a vanilla port, either. In addition to the game's pyjama-clad, limb-chopping hero Ryu Hayabusa, PS3 owners will also now be able to play as Ayane or Momiji, his sexy little ninja playmates. There's also exclusive content such as new enemies, bosses, weapons, 30 challenge stages for online co-op play, and PSN leaderboards. We're also hoping for 1080p visuals, as per the original Sigma conversion. Over to you then, Kratos. Got the guts for it?

Ninja Gaiden Sigma II is due out in Japan and the US this autumn, with a UK release to follow at a later date.



▲ The game features the most impressive dismemberment this side of a Jeremy Paxman interview.



The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

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Home

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Out Now



OPM's digital empire goes live shortly, adding breaking news, forums and much more besides. Here's what it will look like...

Latest Issue (No 030)

Home Page

Editor's Blog

News

Reviews

Previews

Competitions

Features

Video

Index Pages

Forum

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Cheats

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KILLZONE 2

inFamous PS3

Review: Sony charges up its latest exclusive



// Latest Blog Post



Monday 6-Apr-2009 14:26 PM

Exclusive - COD Modern Warfare 2
Infinity Ward gives us a world-exclusive first look at its deadly shooter sequel. Game of the year 2009? We've laid our bets already.



Monday 6-Apr-2009 10:26 AM

Interview: Shinji Mikami

We talk to the mind behind Resident Evil about leaving the series he created, and what he'd have done differently with Resident Evil 5.

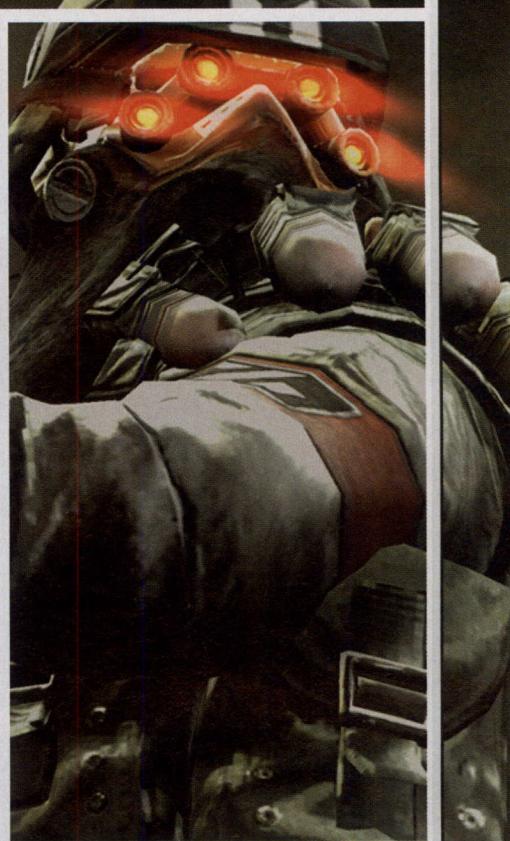


Friday 3-Apr-2009 16:46 PM

Gran Turismo - new shots

Sony has passed us the latest screens of Polyphony Digital's long awaited driving sim/chilling car pornography Gran Turismo 5. Shiny.

More Blogs



Join the Forum

3

OPM's online arrival

Our new website means you need never be without us

Casting around
No dangerously expanding digital empire is complete without a podcast, and so along with our new website and PSN magazine we're launching our very own. We've got plenty of ideas – mostly stolen, some terrifying, a few musical – but what we really want to know is what you guys would like to hear in any potential 'cast. Email opm@futurenet.com and let us know.

Yeah, we know, 'what took you so long?' Well, although we've been pretty sure that the internet was going to take off for a while now, we wanted to be 100% before really getting involved. But that time is now, our Deathstar-style online presence is about to go fully operational, and this is what we've got planned.

Bookmark now

The URL to stick in your favourites is officialplaystationmagazine.com, and

will go live in the next few weeks (it might have already happened – go have a look!). In addition to all the usual stuff – reviews, features, and up-to-the-minute news – we'll have daily blogs from the OPM team, links to our Twitter feed, and videos from our new PSN service FirstPlay. Plus we'll have a forum where you can tell us exactly what you think of our new digital empire (unless it's anything negative, in which case your comments will, of course, be

cleansed from the board with a rigour not seen since the Inquisition). Still love you, though.

So as well as everything you've come to expect from the mag, we'll now be able to break stories as they happen. Think of it as fortifying the cement holding together the bricks of a magnificent castle. Or, if you prefer, as a new site, which we're going to make strong like a little fighting bear.

Our website is up at officialplaystationmagazine.com now and will be going live shortly.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about



4

PlayStation posers

Fans get snapped for the We Are PlayStation compo

What image best sums up the spirit of PlayStation? Is it the sun glinting off the bodywork of a Nissan Skyline in Gran Turismo? The hateful glow of Helghast eyes in the dark perhaps? Or maybe it's hairy-chested Spanish men playing Guitar Hero in cheap wigs?

No, this isn't a trawl through our Facebook photo album. Hundreds of fanboys and girls across Europe have uploaded their game-themed snaps to weareplaystation.com in a bid to win prizes and for the chance to star in a new ad campaign. The winner will be the person who best captures the spirit of PlayStation in a single photo. They'll get £1,000 (around €920) and a Sony D-SLR a350 camera for their trouble, plus there are £100 prizes for ten runners-up, and 100 third-place prizes of a game or PlayStation Store voucher. Around 1,800 images have already

been uploaded to the site, where users can rate their favourites. So far it's looking like dressing up and toys are going down well – currently the top photos include Cruella de Vil playing SingStar with a Roman soldier and a Homer doll hugging a PS3.

Snapped up

By the time you read this Sony will have started the meticulous judging process ("Guys, are we *sure* this singing baby is cuter than the cat licking the PSP?"). The results will then be posted for your viewing pleasure on weareplaystation.com and you can expect to see some of the shots appearing on advertising campaigns in the near future. For the record, we're backing 'hot girl plays Guitar Hero' for the win.

Think you can take a better PlayStation-themed snap? Send your best efforts to opm@futurenet.com.



Rock Chick

Tousled hair? Check. Steely rock stare? Check. Giant aviator shades in which you can spot the photographer? Check.

 018



5 Jaffe talks shock & gore in God Of War III

Kratos' creator on what he thinks of the new game

We're talking to the director and co-creator of the original PS2 God Of War game about the latest instalment of the Greek adventure. Specifically, the fact that the heavily censored online trailer for God Of War III lacks much of the game's blood and gore, which so far has only been seen by a few people (including us) behind closed doors. "They've managed to retain the violence," he says. "I think they've got all that down pretty good. For me personally, if I was directing that game, I'd be raising f***ing hell. That's why you buy God Of War. You show that stuff. I don't know what they're up against – for all I know legal's come down and said 'you cannot do this'."

Raising the bar

So what was it like when he got his very first look at God Of War III on PS3, in which Kratos now gets to disembowel mythical beasts in astonishing detail? "John Hight (director of internal development, Sony Computer Entertainment America) calls me into his office and says, 'Hey, you wanna have a look at this?' I remember being in there and I started sweating. I'm literally sweating, thinking 'F*** man, these guys have really raised the bar here.' The next thing we want to know is if

it's weird for Jaffe to be watching the Ghost Of Sparta in action, now he's no longer a part of the team? "You know it really isn't. You have a memory of being in the studio until four in the morning. You have a memory of going to E3 and seeing your game and getting awards and having the fans love your work. You remember those moments but you feel detached from it. It's more of an interesting thing for me to look back and say, 'Wow, I made God Of War at some time.'"

So does he have any regrets or secret yearnings to get involved in the series again? "They [Sony] have kept me in the loop as much as I need to be and I really am appreciative of that, but it's their game," he concludes.

With the third game bringing the story he originally started to a close, however, how does Jaffe think it matches his original vision? "I can't say now, but Cory [Barlog – director on God Of War II] and I were like, 'We know how this thing is going to end.' Now that Cory and I are gone I don't think they are following the ending that we'd originally set up." So what was the original ending then? "I think it would have been brilliant, but I'll wait until God Of War III comes out to say what it was because I wouldn't want people to judge my ending against their ending. I think there's



Dev bio

Jaffe has created Twisted Metal Black, God Of War and PSN's Calling All Cars. He currently owns his own development company Eat Sleep Play and is rumoured to be working on a PS3 version of Twisted Metal.

019

something in God Of War I – a relief sketched into a piece of the level that actually talks about the war on Olympus. So I guess we had that worked out by then. It's hard to remember – it's been so long."

What happens next

So now the third game has been unveiled on PS3, is Jaffe happy with how his murderous bald baby has grown up? "I think it's going to be amazing. I know the people involved – they're all really talented, really passionate, and really hardworking, so I think it's going to be great." And what of Jaffe's next project, in development for Sony at his new company Eat Sleep Play. Any clues? "I can't. I would love to, but we're deep into production – we spoke to Sony recently about release dates and stuff so we have an idea of when that's going to be, but it's Sony's game, they will announce it when they're ready."

Stay tuned for more from David Jaffe on the making of God Of War in our huge retrospective, coming soon.



■ 15-year-old Max McGuire is officially the youngest race driver in Britain.

6

From Turismo to the track

Boy racer learns his trade on PlayStation

Tears for gears

McGuire isn't the first person to virtually train for a race. Top Gear's Jeremy Clarkson attempted to match his virtual time completing the Laguna Seca circuit in a Honda NSX on Gran Turismo 4 on the real track. His best game time was 1m40s; his best real time was 1m57s.

"What I did was prove that you can go faster on a sofa in your sitting room than you can in a supercar on a race track." You can see the video for yourself at snipurl.com/e294m.

When it comes to racing games, most of us baulk at using the brakes, much less manual gear shift. But for 15-year-old Max McGuire his PS3 provides vital practice for a career as an actual race driver. That's right, he's not even old enough to buy *Mad Max 2* on Blu-ray, but he's already got an eye on the F1 pit girls.

McGuire competes in the Ginetta Junior Championship, but he's too

young to race at the venues on standard practice days the way adult racers would. So he uses the TOCA Race Driver games, *Gran Turismo 5 Prologue* and a simulator rig with pedals and a wheel to learn the tracks instead. "They are generally quite accurate," he told us. "They help me spot places where the car can get damaged, like gravel traps or large kerbs, but the main advantage is helping me learn the racing lines and gears I need to use at each corner."

Career steer

While the games help as a learning tool, they can't capture the feeling of racing in front of thousands of spectators, or the more dramatic

moments. "The biggest difference is crashing – obviously for real it can be painful and expensive, so I prefer the crashes to happen in the comfort of my own home!" Understandable when you consider that a G20 car costs upwards of £15,000.

McGuire has been racing since he was nine, graduating from karts to his current Ginetta G20 ride. He's currently fourth in the Ginetta Junior Championship table, but with the season just starting he's eager to be a big star in motorsport. "Anything from BTCC to F1 will do me!" Find out where he's racing at the official Ginetta website ginettacars.com.



Driver talk

"Hoping to make it as a professional racing driver sounds like every boy's dream, but I think I stand a chance of making it come true based on my racing experience so far."

Max McGuire Boy racer

You can follow Max McGuire's progress at his website maxmcguire.co.uk.

The Big 10

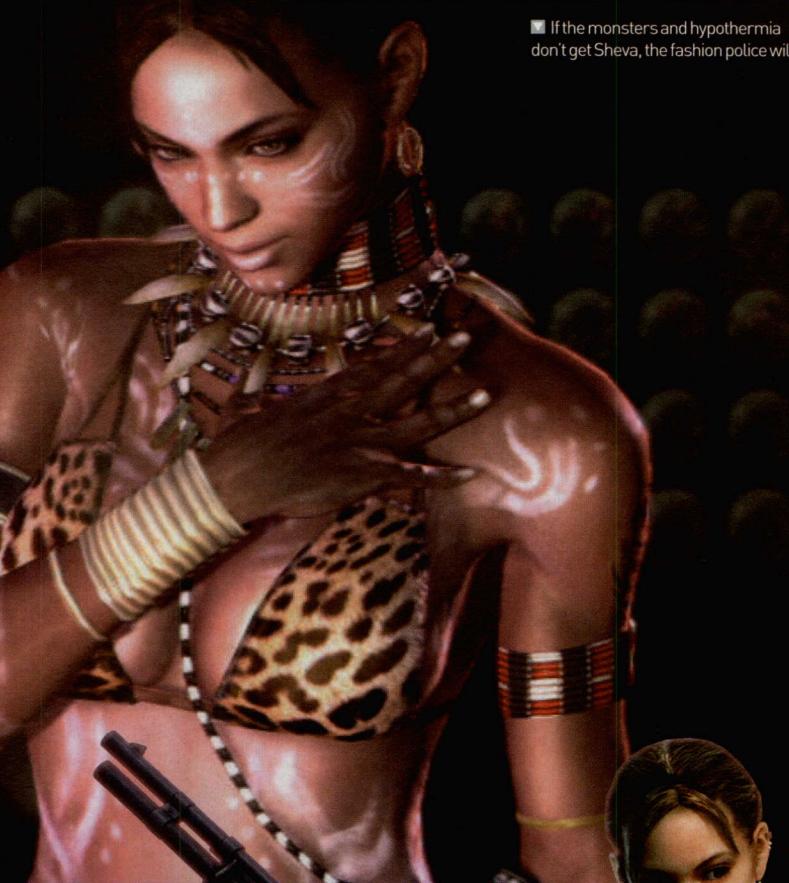
Stories everyone's talking about



Clubbing!



Tribal!



■ If the monsters and hypothermia don't get Sheva, the fashion police will.

7

The secret costumes to sex up Sheva

How to unlock Resi 5's extra outfits

Gun show

You can also unlock character-specific weaponry by upgrading the in-game guns. There's a gatling gun for Chris if you fully upgrade the VZ61 machine gun, and an old-skool longbow for Sheva when you max out the S75 rifle. Or, to get the hydra triple-barrel shotgun for either character, spend your pennies beefing up the Ithaca M93 shotgun.

A fur bikini and a few smears of body paint might not be the most practical outfit for fending off parasite-infected madmen, but Sheva's rocking it anyway. And we say to hell with practicality – just because the fate of the world rests on your shoulders doesn't mean you can't look fierce.

The Tribal and Clubbin' outfits are extras in Resi 5. To unlock the bikini you need to complete all the chapters and find the 30 BSAA emblems. Clubbin' is easier: just play the game through. Chris also has two outfits, his STARS uniform (which will cost

you a finished game and 25 BSAA emblems) and a Safari suit seemingly borrowed from a '70s pimp.

There are other treats too. Jill and Wesker are available as playable characters in Mercenaries mode, but only if you can earn an A grade on some of the later missions (the Ship Deck and Public Assembly for Jill, the Prison and Mines for Wesker). It's likely to take a good chunk of a weekend to get them mind, but you didn't have any plans anyway, right?

For a complete guide to all the unlockables available in Resident Evil 5 head over to snipurl.com/e25vh.



021



The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

8

What you want in Modern Warfare 2

Infinity Ward is sifting Twitter suggestions for the next Call Of Duty. Here are some of the best so far...

**THE ABILITY TO
CHOOSE THE SEX OF
YOUR CHARACTER FOR
MULTIPLAYER AND
SINGLE-PLAYER. SEXY
MARINE CHICKS FTW!**

**DESTRUCTIBLE
WALLS AND
COVER, AND BLOW
PEOPLES ARMS
AND LEGS OFF.
(GEWEHR98)**

The option to 'loot' corpses. If the person you kill has two grenades/ claymores left and you still have yours, you should have four of each.

(Cazualty86)

**Customising your character,
new weapons, revamped HUD
system and 20-player online.
Oh, and surprise us!
(TheGamingOwl)**

Co-op for the story campaign. I enjoy working with my clan - it inspires teamwork. (jcmarkel)

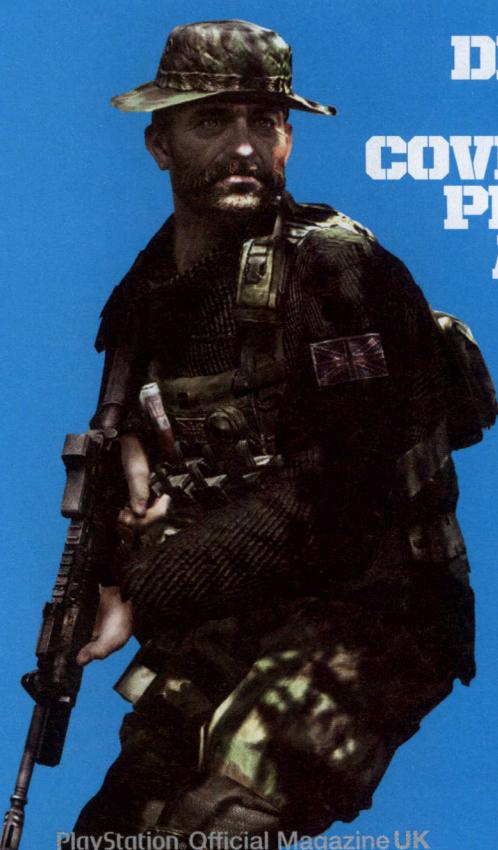
(flowery_air)

**An enemy called Pvt Trey
Arch to shoot in the arse.
(dartmonkey)**

Multiplayer maps with changeable weather and time of day. (jdm79)

**DON'T DROP
MARTYRDOM - CHANGE IT
SO THAT YOU
HAVE TO HAVE
A GRENADE IN
ORDER FOR IT
TO WORK.**

(KevinDoyle)





ABILITY TO ACTUALLY KILL THE PILOT IN A HELICOPTER BY SHOOTING AT THE COCKPIT GLASS.

(Logan832)

Hostage rescue and extraction game type. (bigkyfan10)

Interesting AI enemies trying to care for the wounded, kicking grenades out of the way, dropping guns... (PMBorisStoke)

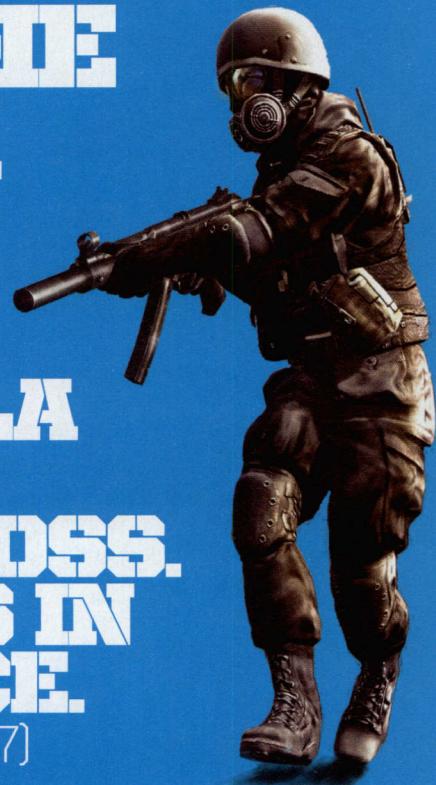
Online leaderboards for clans and regions. (markdono)

More challenges. For the gun challenges 150 is kind of easy to reach. Maybe make it go to 300. More of a challenge for gun camos. (oh_no_epidemic)

CoDTV so people can spectate at other matches. (MrTTT)

I'D LIKE TO SEE GODZILLA AS THE FINAL BOSS. THANKS IN ADVANCE.

(dragon_heart007)



023

OCTO CAMO UNLOCK FOR WEAPONS AND CHARACTERS. MAKE IT A HIGH-LEVEL UNLOCK OR CHALLENGE.

(Thornraven)

ALLOW FOOTAGE TO BE FILMED IN-GAME AND SHARED VIA THE COMMUNITY WEBSITE. PLEASE!

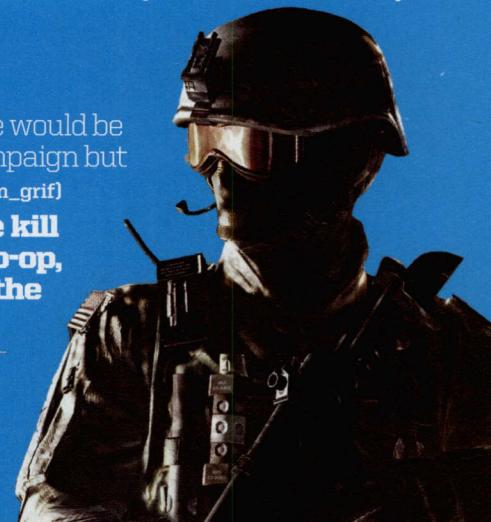
(Wailord)

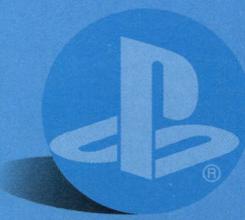
Online co-op, more DLC and no dogs! (TheDno)

A kind of 'terrorist hunt' mode would be great for when I'm sick of campaign but don't want to play online. (adam_grif)

More perks, configurable kill streak bonuses, online co-op, fools getting stabbed in the neck, snakes! (jeffgerstmann)

What do you want to see in Modern Warfare 2?
Get involved at twitter.infinityward.com.





The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

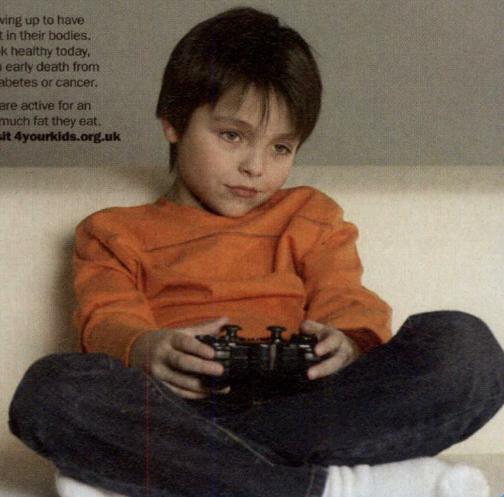
IS A PREMATURE DEATH SO TEMPTING?

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9

Gaming comes under attack again

New Government health campaign sparks controversy

Push the button

On the subject of games under fire, Conservative consumer protection spokesman in the European Parliament, Malcolm Harbour MEP, has come up with a novel way to tackle the problem of minors playing games with inappropriate content. Namely, a red button on consoles enabling parents to disable videogames they deem too violent/spicy for their kids. Here's an idea: rather than retool videogame hardware worldwide how about penalising those who supply 18-rated titles to children in the first place?

What's wrong with the above ads? [Hint: it's *not* that no child since 1948 has willingly eaten a glacé cherry.] If you're the Government, keen to raise awareness of the impact of a sedentary lifestyle and unhealthy diet for kids on life expectancy, the answer is 'not much'. If, however, you're part of a games industry long since sensitised to being lazily blamed for society's ills, then the image of a child gripping a controller, linked to the phrase 'early death' is insulting and massively out of step with the

modern face of videogames.

Criticism of gaming's singling out has come from numerous industry figures. "The use of negative stereotypes to address such a complex issue is ill-informed," said EA UK's managing director, Keith Ramsdale. "The Government [is] out of touch, and [its] so called facts or intelligence is flawed," said Rod Cousens, Codemasters' CEO. Even Jane Holdsworth, the marketing director of Business4Life – the group of companies donating a combined £200m to the campaign – voiced concerns: "It's irrational and grossly unfair to pick on a single product." The Advertising Standards Agency, meanwhile, has dismissed a formal complaint, explaining it 'did not consider the ad likely to mislead readers about the benefits of some

videogames towards fitness and cognitive development in children or to cause offence for that reason'.

Fitter, happier

Fuelling the industry's indignation is the fact that Business4Life includes companies like Mars, Nestle, Coca Cola, BSkyB, ITV, and Viacom whose products could just as easily have been featured but which are conspicuously absent from the ads.

While there may be an argument to be made about a lack of balance, in essence, the ad reflects how kids entertain themselves today. Games outsold music and movies in the UK last year. As with *anything*, parents (the ad's real target) simply need to moderate their kids' consumption.

What do you think of the Government's Change4Life campaign? Let us know at opm@futurenet.com.



Sony talk

"The games industry must demonstrate when it has been a cause for good... The products we make often aid social interaction, improving life skills and even fitness."

Ray Maguire MD, SCE UK

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ATARI



The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

10 Were we wrong about Saints Row 2?

OPM playboys debate the game's controversial 5/10 score



Yes

Says open-minded Stilwater convert, **Ben Wilson**

Playing Saints Row 2 is like being at a 'We h8 GTAIV! LOL' party hosted by 12-year-olds. It revels in its brash knob joke humour and total inability to offer anything approaching competent voice acting or well thought out mission structure. Essentially, it's a bit of a mess. But sometimes – as my spare bedroom would testify – mess is fun to revel in.

Game for a laugh

See, behind the failed funnies and lame voiceovers is a sandbox game with one real ambition: to let you do stupid stuff, wherever and whenever you fancy. And on that basis it absolutely works. And for all developer Volition's pretend

indifference to Rockstar, SR2's success is directly down to it mimicking the ridiculousness of San Andreas – going on killing sprees armed with no more than a coin-op newspaper box, squeezing between tall buildings in a biplane, doing as much property damage as you can within a specific time limit in the brilliant Mayhem mode. Oh, and for the record, its soundtrack craps on GTA IV from a great height.

Ultimately, you can moan all you like about it appealing to the lowest common denominator, but whatever morals it – and you – stand for, the bottom line is that it is fun. Which is first and foremost what any game should be. So if the critics feel they're too highbrow to visit Stilwater, more fool them – they're missing out on an at times triumphant game just so they can crow on about how grown-up they are.

Think Saints Row 2 deserved more than a feeble 5/10? Text SAINT YES to 87474.

No

Says arthouse exponent and defender of the medium, **Nathan Dittum**

Were we wrong to give Saints Row 2 a kicking? Jesus God, no. Within just ten minutes of playing the game the following things had happened: I'd kicked a female police officer in the crotch and murdered about a dozen innocent guards while escaping from prison, then I stabbed a naked woman in the head with a samurai sword and shouted 'faahk oof!' in a terrible mockney accent at an entire city.

The whole thing's morally repugnant – cheap, exploitative, and desperate to sell itself to sniggering idiots. This is the series that went toe-to-toe with Grand Theft Auto IV – and lost, savagely. And the comparison now is crushing – GTA IV with

its wonderfully complex metropolis, intricate moral pathways and vibrant characters, and then Saint's Row 2, with Tera Patrick's lumpen plastic bangers and its grotesque custom character builder and anti-comedy.

Short of the mark

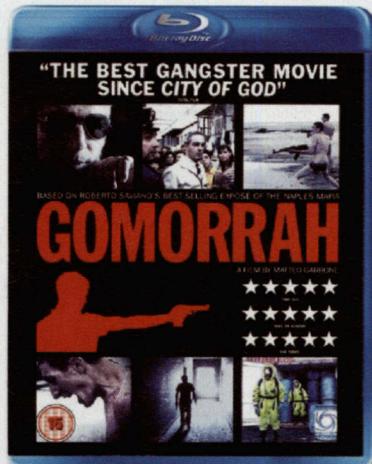
Even the gameplay, SR2's supposedly fun saving grace, is a flaky disgrace. The vehicles handle like weightless toy cars, the shooting is last-gen GTA-standard and the collision detection is, I assume, legally blind. You might be able to wring a few laughs out of it in multiplayer, but this is a question of ambition as much as anything else. Games can do so much more than this – Saint's Row is the idiot child of everything that's wrong and backwards with the medium, and should be thrown into a volcano.

Happy to do a little dance on Saints Row 2's grave? Text SAINT NO to 87474.

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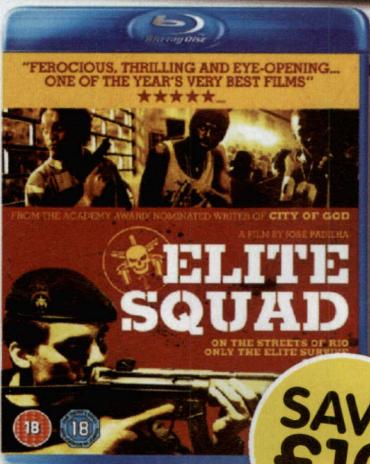
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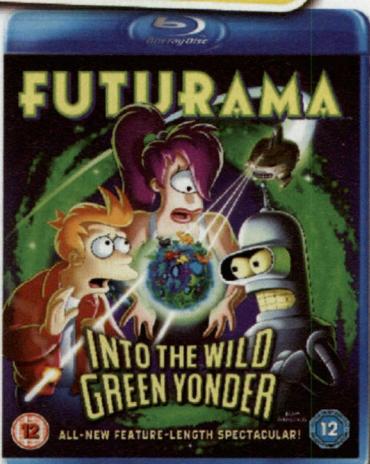
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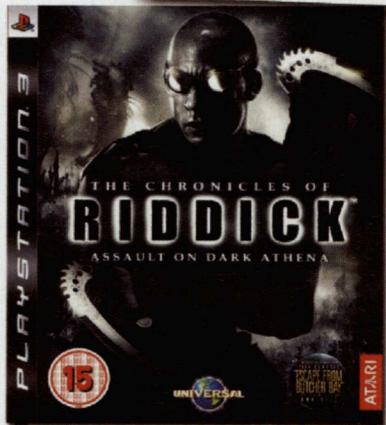
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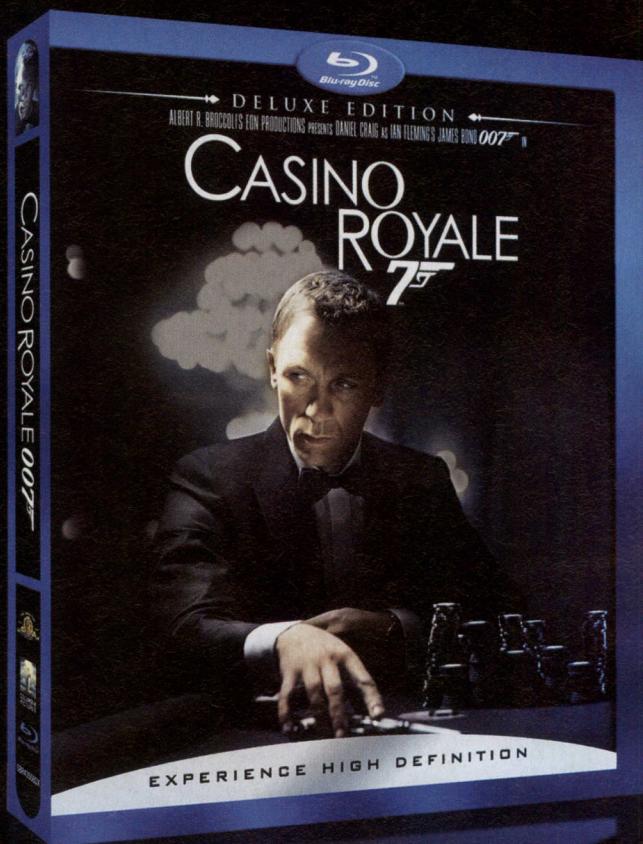
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CASINO ROYALE



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Agenda

PlayStation news,
views, happenings
and people...

30 **Informer**

Big game issues
investigated by
OPM's crack team.

32 **Culture**

The PlayStation
people who make
gaming great.

34 **Personal**

Hot opinion from
those in the know.

35 **Tech**

Shiny things you
can't live without.

36 **Sony**

New kit beamed
down from the
Sony mothership.

38 **Events**

Your gamer's
guide to the
month ahead.

Informer



Arcade Heaven

PS3 fight sticks put through their paces

Played with a DualShock, Street Fighter IV will strip the prints from your thumbs in a matter of minutes. Sure, that's fine if you're planning the perfect murder but not if you want to live a blister-free, combo-rich life. A decent fighting controller will enable you to nail that spinning piledriver every time, and fundamentally change the way you approach the game.

Tekken 5, Virtua Fighter 5, and Street Fighter IV were our testing ground for the six most popular PS3 fighting controllers. We've been using sticks since the early days of PS3, when the Real Arcade Pro wouldn't work with PS2 games and fans were shipping over the Virtua Stick High Grade from Japan. Times change, Mad Catz has suddenly upped its game, and the world of joysticks is now more complex than ever. So allow us to guide your shaking hand to victory.

RUMOUR MACHINE

Insider whispers

Val Halen will be the next band to get its own Guitar Hero game. (Where the hell is our Mogwai edition, eh?)



Best hope that the missus' old knickers fit, as disguises will play a major role in Assassin's Creed 2.

Activision is creating its own line of karaoke games called - and we can hardly type this - Sing Hero.

031

Pocket nurses! Climax is remaking the first Silent Hill for PSP.

Ready At Dawn isn't done with PSP - it's got another God Of War on the way.

Konami is advertising for staff to work on a new Metal Gear project.

Following in Fiddy's footsteps, rapper, entrepreneur and Mr Beyonce, Jay-Z, is in discussions to appear in his own videogame.



Hori Real Arcade Pro 3

Price £80 Stockists play-asia.com, yesasia.com, amazon.com Best for Old-skoolers

Built like a battleship with a faux carbon fibre finish, the Real Arcade Pro 3 has been the PS3 stick of choice for the best part of two years. Hori's premium arcade model uses a stick made by Japanese arcade manufacturers Sanwa and a rock-solid weighty base, though like the Death Star it has a critical and obvious weakness in its off-the-shelf stock Hori buttons. Only the most hardcore of purists will notice those few inauthentic components, so the Real Arcade Pro is still the most competitively priced high-end stick on the shelves, provided you're prepared to look to shelves in Japan and the USA.

8 Pros Sanwa stick, colossal size, sturdy construction
Cons Hori buttons, import costs

Sega Virtua Stick High Grade

Price £130 (approx) Stockists ebay.co.uk Best for Fashionists

Sega's sleek black Virtua Stick is so sexy you'll want to rub it all over your naked flesh. Released alongside the Real Arcade Pro, the Virtua Stick High Grade was originally cheaper than Hori's brute even with its authentic Sanwa stick and buttons straight from the Virtua Fighter 5 arcade cabinet. Sega's stick is housed in a smaller shell than the Real Arcade Pro and its six-button setup is a more natural way to play most fighting games, but while the Hori stick is still in production, Sega ceased manufacturing their own stick some time ago. Given ebay prices, the Mad Catz Tournament Stick is the better option.

8 Pros Six-button setup, Sanwa stick & buttons
Cons Limited availability, six buttons may hinder you



Mad Catz Street Fighter IV Tournament Stick

Price £150 Stockists gamesharkstore.net, amazon.co.uk, shopto.net Best for Purists

Short of hacking at the Street Fighter IV arcade cabinet with an angle grinder you won't find a more authentic controller than Mad Catz' Tournament Stick. The case resembles the Viewlix cabinet that SFIV calls home, and the guts use the same Sanwa-manufactured stick and buttons, right down to their model numbers and layout. Every component feels like it was designed to survive a war - or at least tens of thousands of angry Japanese Street Fighters - and as a home controller it'll very likely live longer than you will. Cut back on the beer and red meat if you want your money's worth; at £150 it's the most expensive arcade controller around.

10 Pros Sanwa stick & buttons, arcade perfect
Cons The most expensive joystick on the shelves

Hori Fighting Stick 3

Price £35 Stockists amazon.co.uk, game.co.uk, play.com Best for Tight budgets

It costs less than a game and is as common as Jeremy Kyle's audience, but nothing about Hori's Fighting Stick 3 is authentic or 'high grade'. It's a wafer-thin stick made of lightweight plastic on a flimsy metal base, with stock components taken from Hori's own warehouse. Regardless, Hori's components are tough enough and the Fighting Stick 3 is a perfectly serviceable entry-level controller for players less confident about gaming with a stick, and a great way to get practice in. If you can execute high-level movements with the Fighting Stick 3, you'll nail special moves and combos on the high-grade sticks with ease.

4 Pros Cheap, easy to get hold of, great for beginners
Cons Lightweight, flimsy, old button layout



Mad Catz Street Fighter IV Fightstick

Price £60 Stockists gamesharkstore.net, amazon.co.uk, shopto.net Best for Modders

Almost a third of the Tournament Stick's price, Mad Catz' standard Fightstick is housed in a similarly sturdy shell, but uses regular stock Mad Catz components. A small number of users have reported faults with sticky buttons (Mad Catz is replacing sticks where necessary). Meanwhile, enterprising modders are using the compact and near bulletproof housing as home to their own custom Sanwa parts. Like Mad Catz' high grade stick, every component can be removed and swapped out in seconds making it the stick of choice for bedroom engineers, though a little costly for amateurs and a little cheap for serious players.

6 Pros Compact size, heavy weight, easily modifiable
Cons Mad Catz stick & buttons, costly for beginners



Mad Catz Street Fighter IV Fightpad

Price £25 Stockists gamesharkstore.net, amazon.co.uk, shopto.net Best for Beginners

Overall, the original PlayStation might have kicked the Saturn's face off, but the Saturn was better for fighting games thanks to its brilliant controller. Knowing that, the Mad Catz team stripped the Saturn pad down and built it again, only better. Its own fighting controller has a squishy D-pad and six face buttons, with a rubberised grip and optional autofire on every button. It's no joystick substitute, but for fighting, the Mad Catz pad is a massive improvement over the DualShock. Without rumble motors it's a little light by modern standards, but nobody wants their pad thrumming during intense competition anyway, right?

6 Pros Big face buttons, autofire, plug and play
Cons Lightweight, stick users will trounce you



Starting out with a nod to the band's forum, Frosties*...



Past the poster of the actual band Frost*...



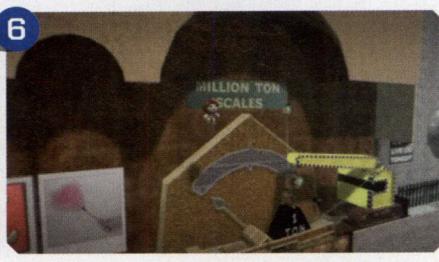
A quick ride on a walkway complete with lyrics...



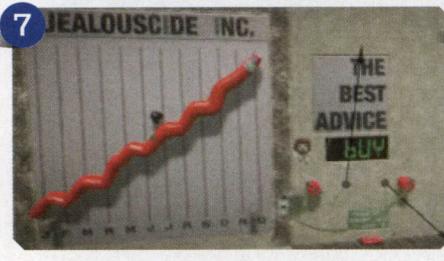
Sets off a domino effect with a load of video cassettes...



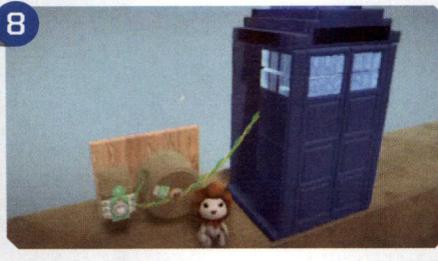
Past the poster for mysterious candidate Prog Dog...



Through a photo gallery and towards the crane...



Onto the seesaw of financial uncertainty...



Into a TARDIS which later dissolves away into vapours...



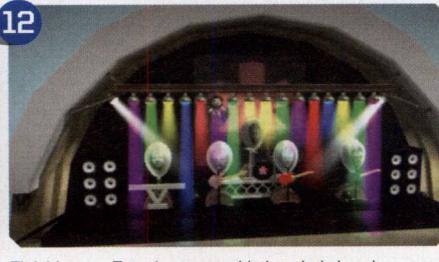
Just in time for the guitar solo by John Mitchell...



Across the piano of a thousand switches...



Past the mosh pit packed with bouncing Frost* fans...



Finishing at a Frost* concert with the whole band.



LBP vs MTV!

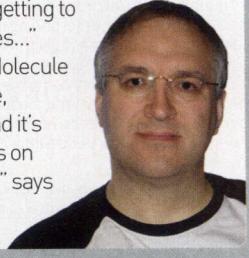
And sackboy wins hands down

Think your LittleBigPlanet level is special? Hold onto your self-esteem and check out snipurl.com/dijom. Designed by Peter Waite, a 49-year-old software engineer from Nottingham, it's a music video for the song Toys by prog rock band Frost*. His sack lion rushes through a perfect set, riding a skateboard, a train, a raft of Tunnock's teacakes, the Tardis, and so on, all synched perfectly to the track. It's astounding.

Waite knew he wanted to make a video after a competition was posted on Frost*'s forum, but didn't know how until he bought LBP. "From the moment I created my first box, the potential to realise all my imaginings just exploded." Creating the

video took around 120 hours – and once Waite had created the levels he then had to play them without putting a sackcloth foot wrong. "The longest single take (from the eGO! catapult to the lorry crash) lasted about 46 seconds and took four hours to get right. I kept getting squashed or forgetting to smile/cry/grip at the right times..."

But it was worth it. Media Molecule has posted the video on its site, Frost* and its forum love it, and it's been viewed over 13,300 times on YouTube. "How cool is all that?" says Waite. We say: very.





Guile is just one of the characters given the 3D makeover at the Game Artisans forum.

Street Fighter gets real

Guile like you've never seen him

Many of us tried to draw our favourite game heroes when we were young, but Mike Kime (below) never stopped. This 3D render of Street Fighter's military man Guile, complete with mega hold hairspray, swollen veins and bloodied bandages, was his entry for a fan art competition at gameartisans.org. "I used to draw him as a kid and as I got older I thought it would be cool to give it a shot again."

It's not surprising that Kime's work is of such a high standard. He works for Epic, the developer behind Unreal Tournament 3 and Gears Of War, as a character artist. Once he's finished designing for cash he goes home and does it for fun. He posts his work on sites like gameartisans.

org and polycount.com, and explains, "Being a part of online competitions, forum posting, and art industry discussion is a growing aspect of my life." See all the competition entries at snipurl.com/cov8s.



OPM HOT TOPIC

If you had to play one game for the rest of your life...



Craig Sullivan
Creative director,
Criterion

"Easy, it's SSX 3. Possibly the greatest sports game ever made, so much to do, so much variety, fun, and polish. A game that makes you smile."



Gavin Carter
Lead producer,
Bethesda

"I think LittleBigPlanet, as the fact that it has so much user-generated content guarantees that the game will stay fresh and fun for quite a bit longer than the average game."



Ben Mattes
Producer,
Ubisoft Montreal

"It would have to be something with infinite replayability, so something deep and rich like Fallout 3 or with lots of opportunity for creativity [maybe LittleBigPlanet]."



Ken Turner
Project director,
Creative Assembly

"Either a racing/rally title like Colin McRae, or something in the fighting genre like Tekken. Either of these can be played over and over again without losing their charm."

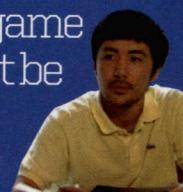
WHO SAID THAT?

V.I.P. quotes

"Games – there's no heart in them." **Andy Serkis** likes the cash, fine.

Noby Noby Boy's dad, **Keita Takahashi**

says it's "a game that cannot be expressed by words."



"SFIV should have a character who beats you with cabbage-sized thumbs," according to TV's **Charlie Brooker**

"If we include a sex mini-game and don't add anything new, people will say it's getting old. If we don't include the sex game the fans will be in uproar." GOW III director **Stig Asmussen**

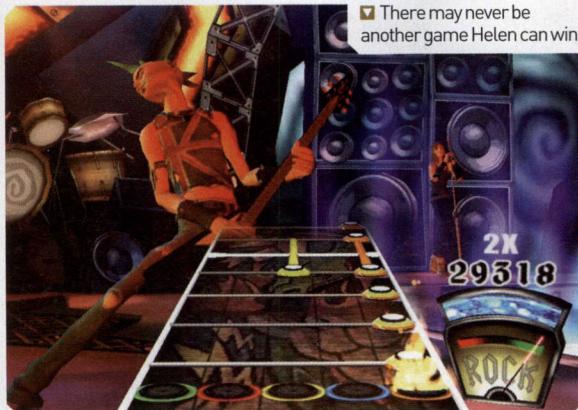


From zero to Guitar Hero

Helen Woodey relives her 15 minutes of fame

When the first Guitar Hero arrived in the OPM office way back in 2005, I watched intently as the little plastic axe was unboxed. "This could be it..." I thought. "The one and only game that no one here can beat me at." Three long years I'd been waiting for this moment. There had never been any point in me joining in the lunchtime PES sessions; no point in trying to beat anyone at any shooting or fighting games – I had zero chance because (shhhh) I'm generally pretty rubbish at most games. But this? Honestly? This was a victory I had in the bag before it was even opened.

Leon took the first go. And sure enough, this was indeed a game where you had to play rock songs on a *plastic guitar*. The concept was clearly genius, and I was pretty sure I'd be good at it. I know quite a lot of rock songs (tick). I can sort of muddle my way round a guitar (tick). And I absolutely love



"You're like some sort of Guitar Hero Rain Man."

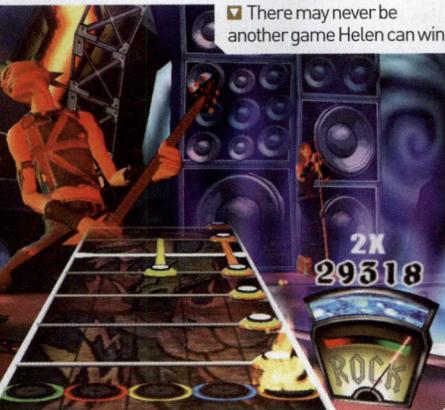
showing off (tick, tick and another big tick). So after watching Leon play a bit of Joan Jett And The Blackhearts' I Love Rock 'n' Roll (albeit quite well) and some others fumble around inexpertly, I picked up the guitar and had a go. I was amazing! Or at the very least, better than the other chancers in the office.

Killer queen

After mincing my way through the game's early, easy songs, I moved onto the more difficult stuff. Queens Of The Stone Age's No One Knows? Go on then. Incubus' Stellar? No problem.

Megadeth's Symphony Of Destruction? Don't mind if I do. Hang on... what's this? I'd failed the song? Failed? What? How can this be? Feeling desperate I called one of the guys from a guitar mag in the office upstairs. "Um, can you play Megadeth? On an actual guitar?" I asked, hoping for some help. Long story short, he came

downstairs, sat in front of the game, looked at it for a few seconds, took a small plectrum out of his pocket (brilliant), put it back in his pocket, then tried to play some notes. And couldn't! He left our office burning with shame, leaving me feeling more superior than ever! I kept playing. All the time. Tim told me: "You're like some kind of Guitar Hero Rain Man." Why yes, yes I was.



On it went. Time passed, and people became less interested. The honeymoon period was over for Guitar Hero, and no one seemed impressed by my skills any more. Then came a chance for me to promote the game at the Download festival. Some advice: if you're ever going to play in front of a crowd as an 'expert', pick the 'expert' difficulty. Not 'medium'. And so, I began to play Ozzy's Bark At The Moon. On medium. I might've thought I was hardcore, but it turned out next to the game's real fans, serious shredders, I was small fry. From then on, it was game over for me.

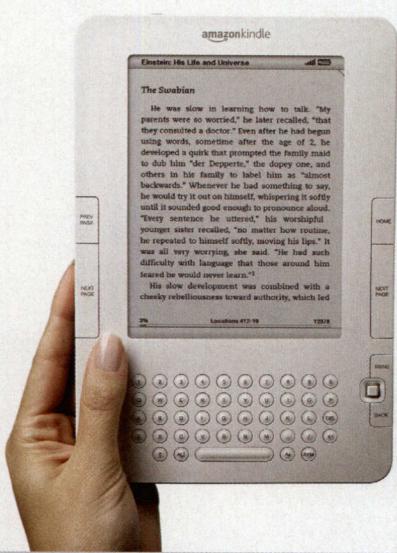
There will probably never be another game that I can beat the rest of Team OPM at. Recent victories over the last few years have been weak – they include making a fairly big Katamari ball and a single victory playing Tim at Soulcalibur IV achieved by frantically mashing random buttons. 15 minutes of gaming fame? Four years ago? Damn right I'm still clinging to it.

LETTER FROM HOME

Nathan Ditum becomes obsessed with rewards and winning things

This month I spent an extraordinary amount of time playing the Echochrome and Icebreaker arcade games. Not because I've gone mad, at least not in the conventional sense, but to win stuff. Increasingly, Trophies are dominating my usual gameplay (*Pling!* 'Yes!') and Home offers an interesting (read: frighteningly addictive) extension of the whole reward mechanism by offering you things you can actually use. So long as by 'use' you mean 'wear in order to look like a half-drawn Stormtrooper in a penguin beanie hat', which is the combined effect of my hard-won new clothes. If the promised ability to display Trophies in Home emerges, I'm doomed.





Samsung Beat DJ

Mix and scratch your own tunes like a homeless Pete Tong on this touch-sensitive DJ phone, complete with glistening Bang & Olufsen innards.

£TBA

samsung.com/uk



G1 Glass Billiards Table

It might look like a futuristic autopsy table but add some colourful balls and a couple of cues and you've got a snooker game no amount of pound coins left on the side will pay for.

£17,585

nottagedesign.com

Wasabi Photo Printer

Delight strangers with the gift of your handsome face. This ink-free printer spits out 2x3-inch colour pictures and stickers for on-the-move narcissism.

£70

dell.com/uk



Kindle 2

Slimmer and lighter than actual books, with room for 1,500 novels and 3G connectivity for downloading, it's marginally less forgiving when you drop it in the bath, though.

£255

amazon.com

Want that

Lust-have kit for PlayStation people

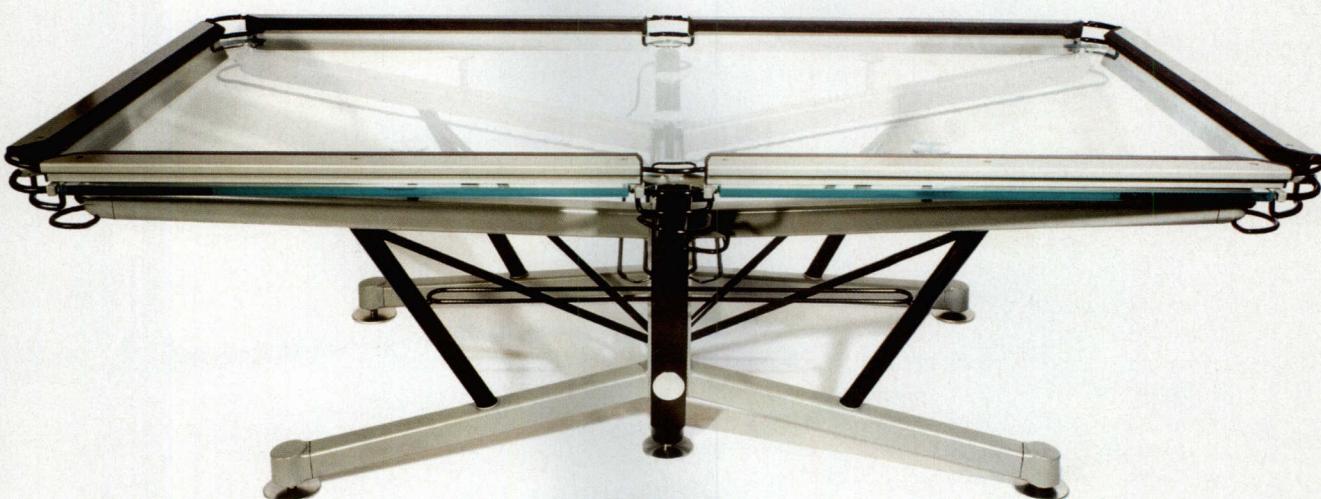
SingStar wireless mics

Free from USB cables, you can finally add interpretive dance to your vocal performances. Total Eclipse Of The Heart will never be the same again.

£34.99

amazon.co.uk

035



Prices and availability of products are all correct at time of going to press.

Sony VAIO P11Z/R

Forgo human interaction completely with this ultra portable PC



£849

vaio.sony.co.uk

In a nutshell

Worried about missing an important Tweet in the 15 minutes between shutting down your desktop PC at home and firing up your netbook at the café? ('Brilliant! Emma's wondering who invented toast!') Or perhaps you're wondering how to blow 850 sheets of your redundancy money on bleeding-edge tech without alerting loved ones to your accelerating fiscal death wish? Then Sony's new, ultra-portable P Series Vaio, with its rapacious WiFi connectivity, eight-inch widescreen and keyboard is the answer to your prayers.

What's so special?

The zeitgeist jury is in and actual human interaction with anything less than 60 friends at once is massively inefficient. Featuring Everywair – Sony's superb, new, WiFi technology typo – the P11Z/R obviates the need for wasteful one-on-one face time forever, enabling you to Twitter in Topman, stream Last FM in Lidl and expectantly email your bank details to someone masquerading as Nigeria's Minister Of Finance as you weave around in the queue outside Spearmint Rhino. And thanks to Everywair's sprightly, max download speed of 7.2Mbps and upload speed of 2Mbps you can have photos of your ashen face up on Facebook before the P11Z/R is wrestled from your grasp.

Tell me more...

While this pint-sized Vaio looks like it's been styled to appeal to tangerine WAGs and trust fund nomads, its innards are predictably top flight and capable of crunching serious data. The 1.33GHz Atom processor and 2GB RAM powering Vista can give laptops four times its size a run for their money, while the 60GB hard drive can store more than enough apps, photos, docs, and bittorrented gentleman's cinema. As a party trick the P11Z/R also features a pair of hot keys – one resizes all open Windows to fit side by side on the screen, while the second accesses a PS3-style XMB, enabling you to view and manage your media instantly without having to boot up Vista first.

Connectivity

Alongside Everywair WiFi at 7.2Mbps the P11Z/R rocks Bluetooth 2.1, two USB slots, Memory Stick Duo/Pro Duo and SD card slots, plus a built-in web cam and stereo speakers so everyone at the Odeon can enjoy Lady GaGa. 'Hey, stylish stranger, would you mind turning that up? There's someone in the toilets who can't hear the lyrics.'

Protection

High-spec technology and the great outdoors have an unhappy history together, but the P11Z/R is designed with the inevitable bumps, jostles and drunk reformatting of hard drives of modern life in mind. G-Sensor HDD Shock Protection will minimise the chance of croissant-battery fingers resulting in a fatally traumatised hard drive, while the Vaio Recovery Utility will help you to get back up and running semi-quickly.



The facts

2GB RAM
1.33GHz Intel Atom
Z520 processor
60GB Ultra ATA/100 hard drive
618g
8" X-black LCD
Windows Vista Home Premium



Metrosexuality

The P Series comes in a quartet of colours – volcano red, ivory white, forest green and ebony black, and each has its own collection of colour co-ordinated accessories including mice and leather cases. In short, there's a very high likelihood that sartorially, the P11Z/R will instantly make you look like a tramp who's just stolen a computer.



PLAYSTATION TOP 10 CHARTS

This month's heroes and zeroes

▲ Up ▼ Down ● Non mover + New entry

PS3

1	●	Resident Evil 5
2	●	Killzone 2
3	+	WWE Legends Of Wrestlemania
4	●	Street Fighter IV
5	▼	Tom Clancy's HAWX
6	●	FIFA 09
7	▼	Call Of Duty World At War
8	▼	Sega Mega Drive Ultimate Collection
9	▼	LittleBigPlanet
10	▼	Grand Theft Auto IV

Source chart-track.co.uk

PS2

1	▲	Ben 10 Alien Force
2	▲	Call Of Duty World At War
3	▲	FIFA 09
4	▼	Persona 4
5	●	Tomb Raider Underworld
6	●	PES 2009
7	●	WWE Smackdown vs Raw 2009
8	●	Need For Speed Undercover
9	●	Lego Batman
10	●	Guitar Hero World Tour

Source chart-track.co.uk

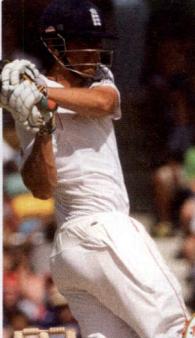
PSP

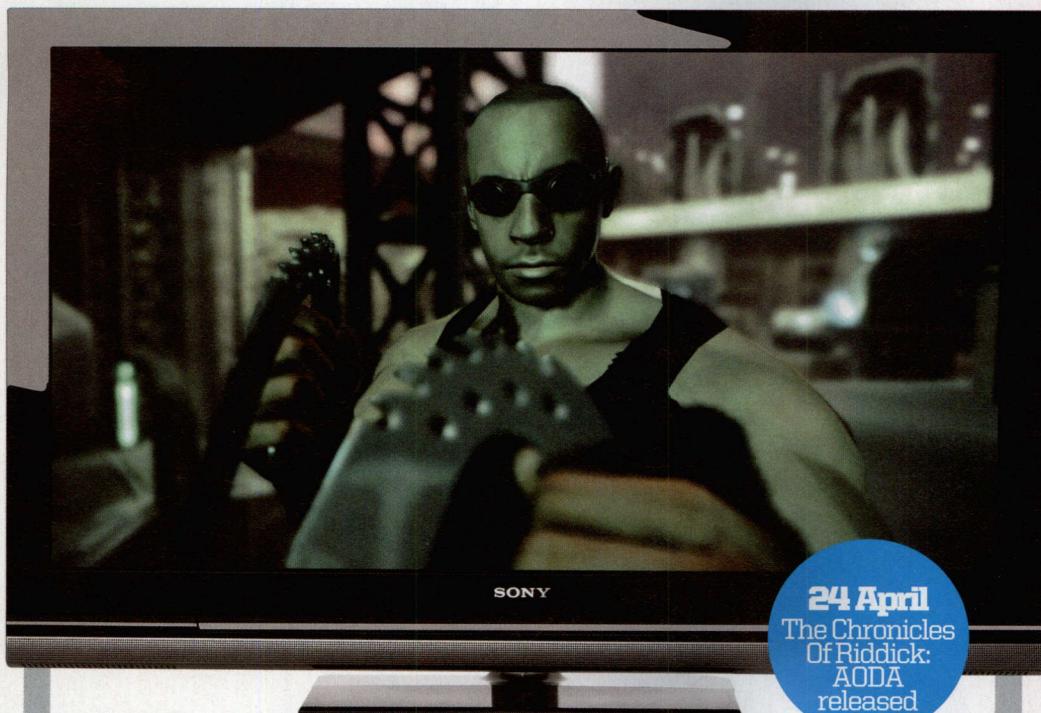
1	+	Resistance Retribution
2	▼	FIFA 09
3	▼	Ben 10 Alien Force
4	▼	Football Manager 2009
5	▼	Need For Speed Undercover
6	●	PES 2009
7	▼	Patapon 2
8	●	Midnight Club LA Remix
9	●	WWE Smackdown vs Raw 2009
10	▲	Lego Batman

Source chart-track.co.uk

The PlayStation entertainment plan

Fill up your life with our monthly guide

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
 <p>PlayStation Official Magazine - UK</p> <p>20 Fiddy fun Presumably running low on diamond skulls, rapper turned freedom fighter 50 Cent releases his new album - Before I Self Destruct. Ironic! 50cent.com</p>	<p>APR 14</p> <p>Issue 31 on sale And you're cradling its delicate pages like a little baby bird right now. Send your watercolour tributes and furiously stenciled threats to opm@futurenet.com</p>	 <p>29 Big cup It's the first leg of the Champions League semis tonight with at least one, and potentially three, British clubs involved. uefa.com</p>	 <p>06 Wicket game England's test series against West Indies gets underway at Lord's today. Batting capitulation pencilled in for Friday. ech.co.uk</p>	<p>17 High voltage The Statham has to constantly electrocute his own heart in order to stay alive long enough to take revenge in <i>Crank 2: High Voltage</i>. Just amazing. crankhighvoltage.com</p>	<p>24 Win an HDTV! The <i>Chronicles Of Riddick: Assault On Dark Athena</i> is out on PS3, and you could win a sexy new idiot lantern to play it on. atari.com/riddick</p>	 <p>01 Pink pound Pray no one hears as you join in with Just Like A Pill when Pink comes on at the 02 arena. "I tried to call the nurse again but she's being a little bitch." "Ssshhh!" pinkspage.com</p>
 <p>27 Naughty girls Pussycat Dolls' new long player, <i>Doll Domination</i>, is out today. Because you only like them for the music, right? pedmusic.com</p>	 <p>04 Perfect day Spend your Bank Holiday watching a bunch of junkies get sick in <i>Trainspotting: Ultimate Collector's Edition</i> - out on Blu-ray today. snipit.com/d8rig</p>	 <p>12 May Issue 32 on sale. Subscribe now on page 26</p>	 <p>08 Warp drive Cut your hair into an uncompromisingly Vulcan fringe and boldly go to the cinema to see the new <i>Star Trek</i> movie. startrekmovie.com</p>	<p>15 Cave in The bleakest (and indeed 'only') horror film made about lady potholes, <i>The Descent</i>, returns with an almost certainly poorer sequel. Yay! lionsgate.com</p>	 <p>18 Scouse day out Guus 'Overtime' Hiddink's enforced London holiday continues as Chelsea play host to Everton. It's live on Sky Sports 1 and HD1. skysports.com</p>	



24 April
The Chronicles
Of Riddick:
AODA
released

Diesel power

Win an HDTV and a copy of Riddick

Coffin-voiced hardman Vin Diesel is back in *The Chronicles Of Riddick: Assault On Dark Athena* for PS3. You haven't experienced the true power of HD until you've seen light glinting off the curvature of Vin's head, so we've got a Sony Bravia up for grabs to make it happen. One lucky winner will get the TV and a copy of *The Chronicles Of Riddick: Assault On Dark Athena*, while five runners up will get just the game. To be in with a chance of winning, just answer this...

TERMS AND CONDITIONS By entering you are agreeing to receive details of future offers and promotions from Future Publishing Ltd and related third parties. If you do not want to receive this info please text the word 'STOP' at the end of your message. Texts will be charged at £1.00 plus your standard network rate. By taking part in a competition, you agree to be bound by the Competition Rules which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at www.futuretcs.com. The winner will be drawn at random from all correct entries after the start date 07/04/2009. Prize draws will take place on 13/05/2009. The winner will be notified within 28 days of the draw. Only UK residents aged 18 and over may enter. No employees of Future Publishing Ltd or any company associated with this competition, or any member of their close family may enter. Prizes as stated and no alternatives, cash or otherwise, are available. Future Publishing Ltd accepts no liability for any loss, damage or injury caused by any prizes won. Publicity may be given to any winners and/or entrants and their names and/or photographs printed. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Proof of posting shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by an individual (not via any agency or similar) and are limited to one per household. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. The editor's decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into. Where prizes are offered on behalf of an associated company these prizes are provided in their entirety by these associated companies. Future Publishing Ltd cannot be held responsible for any failure to provide prizes as specified and all enquiries relating to such prizes will be referred to the associated companies. You may have to provide additional information. Receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Competition Rules. No purchase necessary. Winner lists are available by written request within three months of the closing date from Future Publishing Ltd, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW.

Which character did Vin Diesel play in the film
The Fast And The Furious?

A SGT TANNER **B** BRIAN O'CONNOR **C** DOMINIC TORETO

Text using the word 'Diesel' followed by a space, then your answer A, B or C followed by a space, then your name and address to 87474. Or enter at futurecomps.co.uk/opm31. Winners will be picked at random from all correct entries.

Closing date: 12 May 2009.

FIVE MINUTE SKIVE

Games to play
when the boss
isn't looking



Minutemen

Play as Silk Spectre or Night Owl, protecting the dirty streets of 1940s New York as you bash thugs in flat caps in this Streets Of Rage-style side-scroller. Again, not a giant alien squid in sight. Boooooo!

snipurl.com/d8n9f



The Kitten Game

You know that guy in accounts who's always sending you hilarious LOLcats (but who's almost certainly a killer)? Why not send him this kitty decapitator to flush him out. "Hello HR..."

snipurl.com/cmhlm



Achievement Unlocked

One for Trophy whores. All you have to do in this miniature elephant platformer is jump around a bit and you'll be racking up awards like Superman at the Olympics.

snipurl.com/cmi3j

THE UK'S BEST-SELLING PLAYSTATION®2 MAGAZINE

PlayStation®2
OFFICIAL magazine-UK



SPIDER-MAN 2
GET YOUR STICKY FINGERS ON OUR EXCLUSIVE SPIDER-MAN 2 REVIEW
WORLD FIRST REVIEW
HITMAN
contracts



FIVE YEARS AGO IN OPM

This month we visit
OPSM #46

Staring with one beady eye through crossed silver AMT Hardballers from the cover of issue #46 was the face of Agent 47, marking our world exclusive review of *Hitman Contracts*. 'Learn it like it's a foreign language, climb deep inside and garrote the deserving' we recommended, before scoring the sneaky kill-'em-up 8/10.

In news we had an exclusive look at *Def Jam Vendetta II* (released as *Fight For New York*), the first details on EA's shameless grave-robbing sequel *Goldeneye 2* (which became *Rogue Agent*), and fairly accurate speculation on *The Godfather* (we said: third-person adventure, based on the first film, with original cast featuring). Oh, and there was our campaign to make Warner Bros do a *Smallville* game, which in retrospect looks a lot like an excuse to run a pic of Kristin Kreuk.

Driv3r was still in previews – it should've been finished months earlier ('If the game provides as tense a rollercoaster experience as its development, *Driv3r*'s going to be the best game on PS2'). We were hot for Micro Machines rip *Mashed* ('More addictive than chocolate-dipped cigarettes') and Rockstar's Wild West ride *Red Dead Revolver* ('Both rootin' and considerably tootin'), but saved our most hyperbolic hyperbole for *Burnout 3* ('Look at this! Stuffgobang!').

As well as *Hitman*, reviews served up an 8/10 for FIFA spin-off *UEFA Euro 2004* (before the actual tournament broke our hearts), and another for slasher slasher *The Suffering*. And *Fight Night 2004*, and *Transformers*, and *Project Zero 2*. But the winner was *SingStar*, with 9/10: 'arguably the best party game ever'. Five years on, there's no 'arguably' about it.



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PLAYSTATION 3

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V
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Preview

42

BATMAN ARKHAM ASYLUM

The would/wouldn't Harley Quinn debate rages. Pros: kinky nurse outfit. Cons: squeaky New Yorker accent. Like needles in our ears.

PlayStation® Official Magazine - UK

Previews

041

Latest info on Planet PlayStation's hottest games

It's easy to call out a game based on first impressions. When we initially saw Batman Arkham Asylum it looked pretty but limited – drop down from the ceiling, whack some goon *really* hard in the spine, and then zip back up into the shadows. That seemed to be it: a triumph for punchy style over thinky substance. Fortunately, having spent five hours playing through missions to see what the madhouse has to offer, it turns out there's more to it. Turn the page to find out what.

Army Of Two: The 40th Day, on the other hand, faces an uphill struggle. The original was a confusing blend of homoerotic buddy movie and messy shooter, saved only by an alright co-op mode. First impressions of the sequel suggest EA is making changes in the right place, though. Deeper tactical options, a more stylised look and edgier morality (like using human shields) could tick the boxes the first game missed. About 95% less hoo-rahing and high-fiving couldn't hurt either.

46

UFC 2009 UNDISPUTED

Four seconds. That's how long it took us to win one of our UFC fights. Just two punches – dynamite and goodnight – and it was all over. We already like this a lot.

48

ARMY OF TWO: THE 40TH DAY

The love that dare not be named. Specifically a love of large bore weaponry and plastic explosives. Yup, Salem and Rios are back.

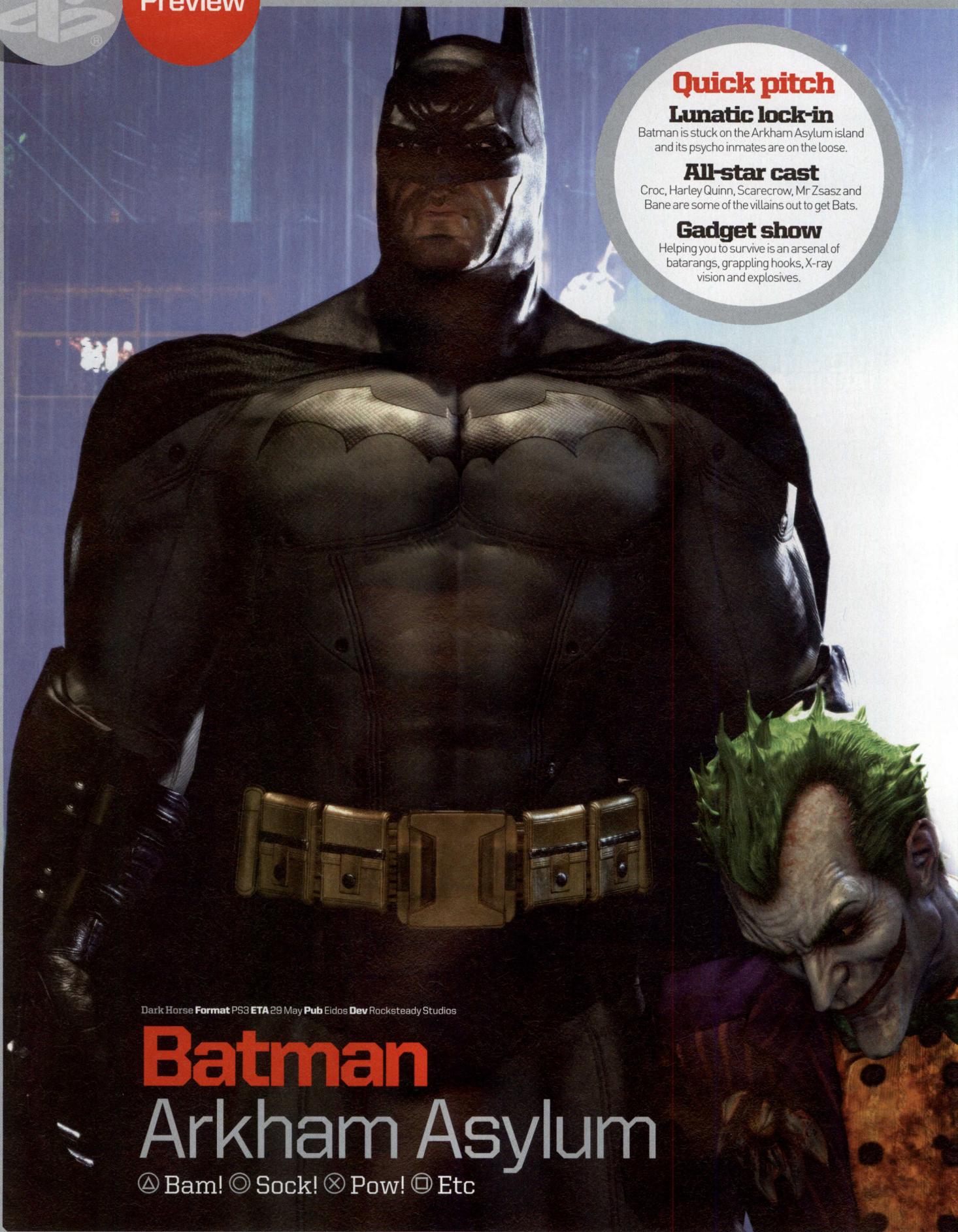
50

THE SABOTEUR

Arthouse stealth-'em-up where a black and white Paris gains more colour every time you whack a Nazi. "I call this shade of red Vermilion Dawn... hey, stop shooting."



Preview



Quick pitch

Lunatic lock-in

Batman is stuck on the Arkham Asylum island and its psycho inmates are on the loose.

All-star cast

Croc, Harley Quinn, Scarecrow, Mr Zsasz and Bane are some of the villains out to get Bats.

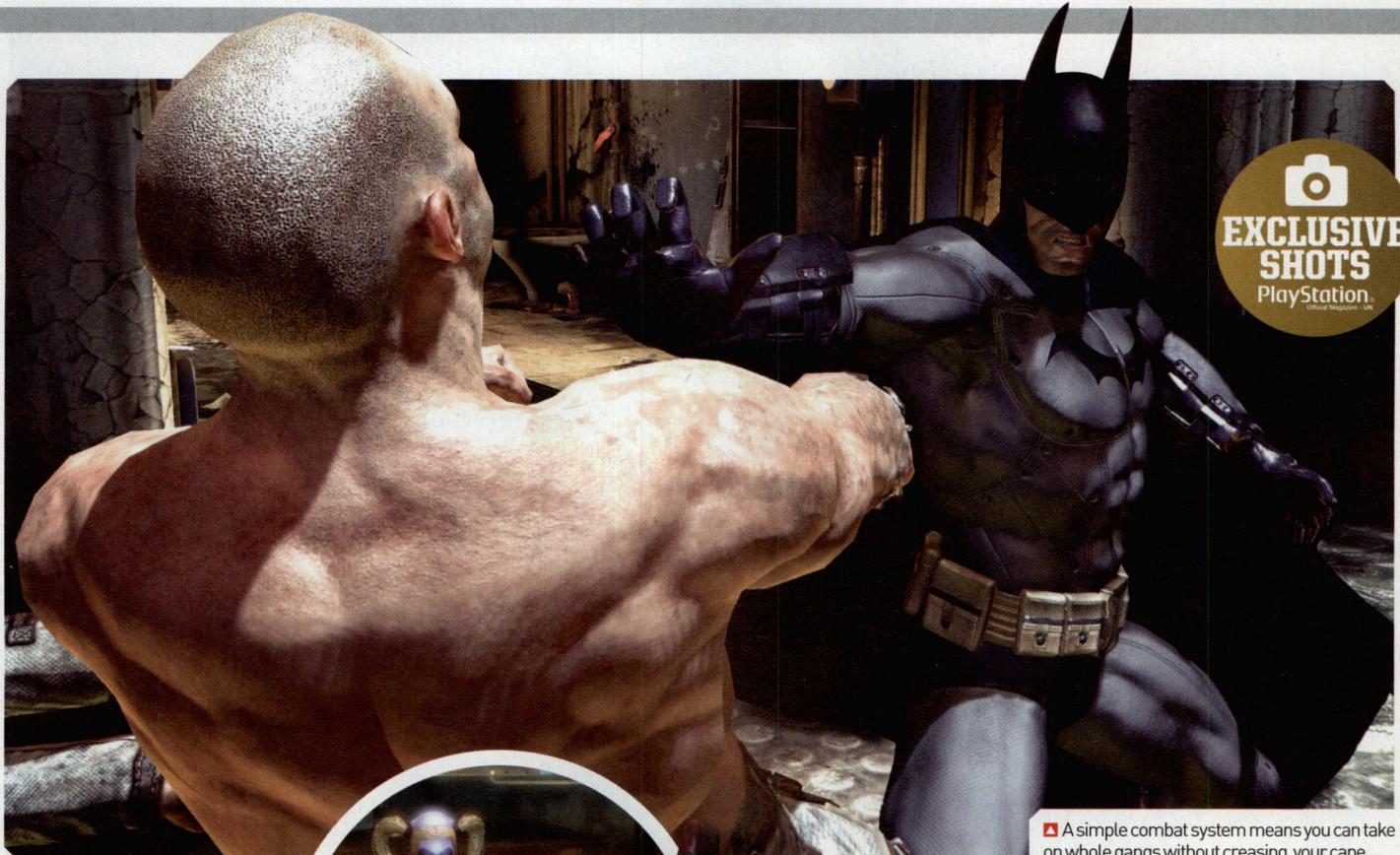
Gadget show

Helping you to survive is an arsenal of batarangs, grappling hooks, X-ray vision and explosives.

Dark Horse Format PS3 ETA 29 May Pub Eidos Dev Rocksteady Studios

Batman Arkham Asylum

Ⓐ Bam! ⓒ Sock! ⓓ Pow! ⓔ Etc



■ A simple combat system means you can take on whole gangs without creasing your cape.

This could be the best superhero game ever! But when you consider Superman and Spider-Man's recent efforts, that's like saying 'best sharp object to sit on'. Fortunately, as it turns out, *Arkham Asylum* really is shaping up promisingly. It does the whole-angry-man-in-tights thing well, with Batman feeling powerful and intimidating; a growling, single-minded vigilante exacting brutal



■ Harley Quinn is the Joker's girl, and helps him take over Arkham Asylum.

vengeance on hordes of villains. The fighting is admittedly super simple, with combos built around two main buttons, attack and parry, but it's surprisingly satisfying. Attacks connect solidly and simple flicks on the left analogue stick keep the punches and kicks moving from one opponent to the next, while well-timed blocks effortlessly deflect any incoming danger.

■ Defeating Bane means cutting off his strength-boosting supply of Venom.



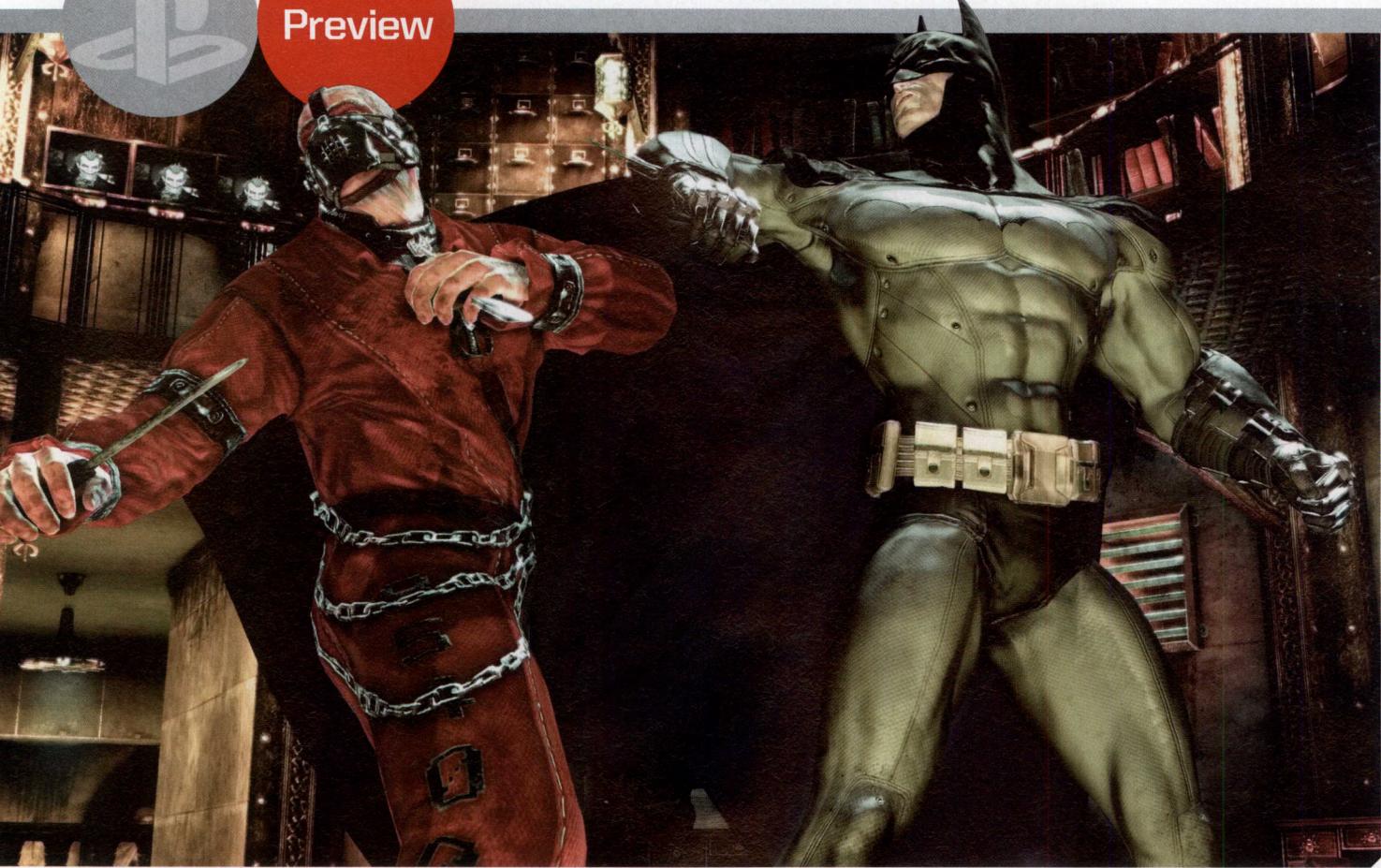
As combat systems go it may never provide any real depth. We unlocked a few new moves but nothing to suggest masses of hidden potential beyond **X**, **X**, **A**, **X**. But it does make you feel like the Dark Knight as you bang out heavies with flowing sequences of hooks, dodges and throws. There's a hint of Jason Bourne to it all: no flashy moves, just the feeling that someone's been practicing punching people a lot and gotten really good at it. What stops the action from becoming boring is that the limited tactics vary depending on the enemies attacking you. Batman can take on ten or more basic grunts easily, flooring them all without taking a hit. But later on they start using collars that trigger alarms when you knock them out, forcing you to employ hit-and-run tactics. And when the Joker's henchmen start waving guns around you have to take to the ceiling, using the grappling gun to zip between gargoyles and dropping down to pick them off one at a time.

Banged up

The only time the system fails is when knife-wielding thugs appear. You can't block or parry them which means you have to rely on a takedown move to finish them – something that's impossible in a crowd, leading to



Preview



044

long, drawn-out battles as you whittle down the numbers. The combo system also feels artificially restrictive. You can only use certain attacks when you've chained together enough moves, which limits your access to the bigger, better abilities you've bought with the XP earned from breaking skulls. When you've paid good bat-money for an arm-breaking grapple you want to be able to use it whenever you want, surely?

Cursed ground

Helping things along is the game's grim, shadowy atmosphere. Arkham

Asylum is a gothic catacomb set on a misty, craggy rock. It's an oppressive, nasty place full of gloomy buildings and spooky graveyards. While Batman can roam around fairly freely, the plot – which sees the Joker taking over the madhouse and letting all the crazies out – keeps things feeling linear. The early stages we played involved tracking one objective at a time: rescuing some guards, dealing with sociopath Mr Zsasz, and finding a way out into the facilities' grounds. We're hoping for some multiple objectives later on. However, despite the fact that these early missions are tackled one at



Knife-wielding crazies are immune to some of Batman's moves, forcing you to change tactics.

a time, the relentless pacing helps hide the linearity. New goals appear thick and fast from Oracle, former Batgirl and Commissioner Gordon's daughter Barbara. Paralysed by the Joker she now provides backup from her wheelchair, feeding information straight into Batman's ear.

Gadgets are a big part of the Dark Knight's arsenal and there are plenty to experiment with here. The most important is a visor which activates something called Detective mode. Flip it on and you get X-ray vision. Gang

Dark Night You've got until morning to wipe that smile off the Joker's face...



The grounds are overrun and not even the Batmobile is safe, forcing Batman to find alternative ways around.



Gadgets, such as explosive gel, destroy weak walls to open up other paths as Batman battles with the Joker, escaped inmates and other enemies like psycho-killer Mr Zsasz.

Can't Wait To Play...



Industry insiders reveal their PS3 faves

Alan Wild
Ascarron Entertainment

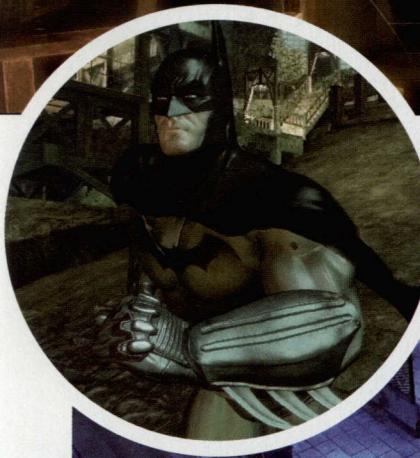
The next Tom Clancy



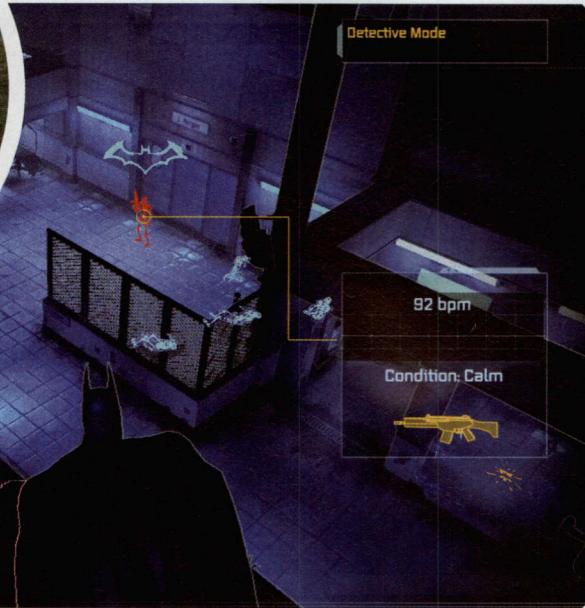
"Ghost Recon, mainly for the challenge, and anything Rainbow Six. The Clancy brand is excellent in delivering what it says on the box. It's authentic - the action, the atmosphere - it's a complete package."

PES 2010

"This will be the next good one. The last game just didn't feel as intuitive and the controls didn't feel as responsive. FIFA actually felt better. I'm a big Pro Evolution Soccer fan so I'm really looking forward to the next game."



► Detective mode gives Batman additional information on the loonies.



Far more fun was an explosive gel spray that could be used to destroy weak walls and lay traps.

Bat into hell

From what we've seen so far Batman Arkham Asylum might be filled with simple ideas, but there are plenty of them - all cleanly executed and shuffled up enough to keep things interesting. It also keeps the pace moving. At the end of five hours with the game we'd seen and done so much we were worried it would be over too soon, only to be told we were on chapter three of 20. So, overall impression so far? Bat-fans should start getting excited, right about... now.

Dev talk



"Batman trains his body to the peak of physical perfection, but is also the world's best detective. He's smarter than the thugs and uses their fear against them. We want the player to experience that."
Sefton Hill
Game director,
Rocksteady Studios

Gran Turismo 5



"It's driving, and it's probably the best arcade racer out there. It looks beautiful, it handles superbly - it's just great fun."

members appear as skeletons, weapons are highlighted and other important objects are picked out in easy-to-see colours. It's fun, but possibly too effective as it solves most problems for you. Way ahead blocked? Flip on Detective mode and look around for the air vent. (It's always an air event.) The most disappointing moment comes when the mode is used to track people. You can scan a specific area for a trace to follow - a brand of whiskey or a finger print, for example. But instead of any actual detective work it simply creates a glowing trail of markers to follow. And after doing this three times in a very short space of time so it got old quickly.



Preview

Dark Horse Format PS3 ETA 19 May Pub THQ Dev Yuke's Osaka

UFC 2009 Undisputed

△ Butterfly ○ Guard ⊗ Mount ⊖ Choke

The big problem for the UFC game isn't how to please the sport's dedicated fan base of shaven-headed, serious-eyed boys in Tapout hoodies. They're sold already. The issue is how to appeal to the wider audience of casual gamers who wouldn't know a Kimura if it was popping their shoulder out. Because this is simulation with genuine depth, that deserves proper attention. Whereas the Smackdown series, also from Yuke's, often feels spongy and weightless, here the strikes connect with real heft. Thanks to accurate physics, blows will glance off your opponent's limbs and burrow through his block. It's even flexible enough for you to land a punch as you're being hit.

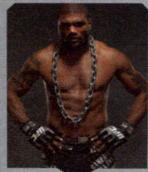
Caged heat

The real action takes place on the deck, though, where following a successful takedown the fighters battle for position, transitioning between the various mount and guard positions, to try to force on a leg-snapping/neck-choking submission. All of that is handled on the right stick, using quarter and half circle motions to outmanoeuvre your opponent.

Surprisingly, it seems to capture the ebb and flow of the real contests nicely. But if you're feeling less technical, you can always go for the old ground and pound – rearing over your prone opponent and going at his face like John Henry hammering railroad spikes into the dirt. Like we said, genuine depth.

▼ You'll need to time your takedown attempts wisely, or get used to the taste of another man's knee.

Pro talk



"I'm a gamer. I've been playing Fallout III – that's taken up a lot of my time. I play Call Of Duty 4 too. I played online a lot until I started getting my ass kicked. Nobody believes it's me, but I don't care." **Quinton 'Rampage' Jackson** Former light heavyweight champ

Caught in action



From dirty boxing to Muay Thai clinches, the big stars all have accurately modelled fighting styles. Wear your opponent down sufficiently to open him up for a KO or submission.



Classic Series Format PSP ETA Autumn Pub Sony Dev Bigbig Studios

Motorstorm Arctic Edge

Ⓐ Turned ⓒ Out ⓓ Ice ⓔ Again

Arctic Edge is a world away from the cut-and-shut conversions that have dogged the PSP format. The new frosty setting points to a wealth of new content, and game director Richard Ogden reckons it will stand up to its big brother. "Track-wise the scale will be similar and lap times comparable," he says. "All 12 tracks are reversible and different enough, including route choices, to make it feel like there are 24 tracks in the game." Bigbig Studios (the team behind Pursuit Force) is also aiming for 12-vehicle races, so events should be suitably deranged.

Snow day!

The mountainous backdrop creates three distinct racing environments depending on altitude. Low-down tracks are a mixture of mud and gravel – your typical Motorstorm circuit.

A little higher up and you'll start to find banks of snow and ice patches. And, at the top, it's all about glaciers, crevasses and avalanches – the sub-zero environment will make for longer speed boosting thanks to its engine-cooling effects. Snow drifts and icy water will extend boost even further. Unlike Pacific Rift, though, there won't be any 'hot' areas that will overheat your car. As Ogden points out, "It just didn't seem appropriate."

Bigbig is planning to squeeze in plenty of options, too, with the main Festival mode backed up by a Free Play mode, Time Attack, an eight-man multiplayer and leaderboards for some extra bragging rights. "Hey, I'm 687,234th in the world. Beat that!"



► Bigger isn't always better. Deep snow will slow you down.

Gut Reaction

What's strong and what's wrong

▲ Paradise improved

The regular DLC drops have made Burnout the best driving game on PS3 by a madman's mile.

▲ The internet

Going online now 100% more exciting as the OPM site blinks into sentience, bringing with it justice, truth and love. (Hopefully.)



New to PSP

There are 24 vehicles in total, snowploughs and skidders making their debut in the series. Environmental events like avalanches can be triggered to take out rival racers. You can customise your ride's paint colour, decals and other vehicle accessories. Bobsleigh corners are tight, icy bends where it's impossible to steer. Instead you need to use boost to get though in one piece.

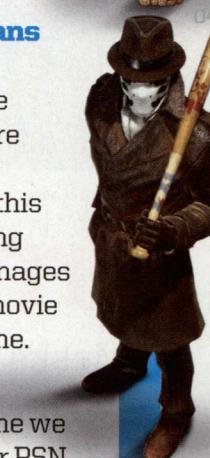
▲ Sticking it

After a painful relearning process, we're all about the arcade stick on SFIV. (With modded buttons.)



▼ Watch out, fans

The comic asks who watches the watchmen? We're more concerned with who'd play this brainless roaming brawler that manages to give cynical movie tie-ins a bad name.



▼ Patch work

Every single game we used for our 24hr PSN marathon required a patch of some sort, and often a sizeable one. Good after-sales care or a symptom of ever more rushed releases?



▼ Let 'em eat cake!

All the government's new heavy-handed anti-game/pastry campaign (check out 4yourkids.org.uk) has done is make us want a delicious bun.



Pro



Hype Magnet Format PS3 ETA Winter Pub EA Dev EA Montreal

Army Of Two The 40th Day

Ⓐ Masks ⓒ Muscles ⓓ Mercs ⓔ Machismo

The Bill & Ted of shooters are back – and this time they're not just in it for the dollar.

The muscle-bound, mask-wearing mercenaries, Rios and Salem, are still trigger-happy jocks who seem oddly comfortable in each other's embrace – but things are different now.

Trapped in Shanghai when private military companies start warring, the boys are left fighting for their lives as the city crumbles around them. You can still take jobs and haggle over prices but this time the main goal is simple: survival. The game will play out across Shanghai's various districts and locations, such as the local zoo and a hospital, which at

least makes a nice change from the dusty plains of Generistan. And city life won't be easy, one scene even sees Rios and Salem taking on a fighter jet.

Bromance

Of course Army Of Two is all about the co-op, and that's still true in the sequel. Whatever you're doing you'll have your partner, either AI-controlled or played by a friend, to back you up. The Aggro meter from the original game (which allows you to draw the enemy's attention so your partner can sneak up on them) returns, and the co-op has a new playbook system. It's part of the GPS and brings up a huge selection of commands for your AI

buddy, like prioritising enemy kills or getting him to interact with specific people and objects. Along with more traditional shooter-style controls, deeper bullet penetration for picking off cowering enemies, and the now automatic 'snap-to-cover' mechanic it feels as though the game has evolved.

After a shaky first outing, EA Montreal is selling this as a more grown-up take on the co-op shooter, so there will be less macho banter and more dilemmas to face. One of these conundrums will apparently be whether or not to use innocent bystanders as human shields. Let's hope the locals don't mind the smell of Le Male par Jean Paul Gaultier.



Head stomping? AOT may be more mature, now, but it's no more subtle.

Quick pitch

Old friends

As well as Salem and Rios, their PMC handler Alice will also be making the trip to Shanghai.

Masked men

When you get to a safe area the boys' masks will lift so you can admire their rugged good looks.

Mo' money

You'll still need to earn cash for buying new guns, and adding that all-important 'bling'.



Wish list

Smarter AI

Here's hoping your AI partner has been working hard on his IQ over the holidays. The new 'playbook' co-op command system will only get you so far.

Better guns

You might have been able to gold plate your assault rifle in the original game but the weapons were weak like kitten burps - making every shot a disappointment.

Online modes

The sequel needs to make the most of the co-op play with more online game types, bigger, better maps, and several competing two-man teams operating in an area.

Could Be A Contender

American McGee's Alice



This one sounds like it's going to be a winner

The premise

Alice, now grown up and orphaned by a house fire, returns to an evil Wonderland.

The reality

A platformer where you battle monsters and explore twisted, spooky levels.

The hook

It's a bloody take on the classic story where Alice must fight for her life against malevolent characters.

The inspiration

The game is loosely based on Lewis Carroll's books and poetry but is viewed through a heavy Emo filter.

The chances

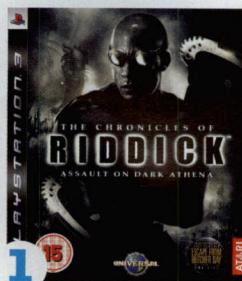
The original game has a cult following and in January this year Sarah Michelle Gellar confirmed she's making and starring in a film adaptation.

Format PS3 ETA TBC Pub EA Dev Spicy Horse



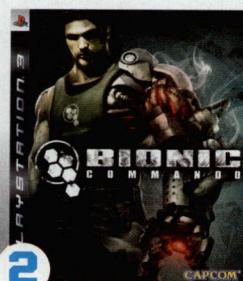
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Pre-Orders The punters' top three



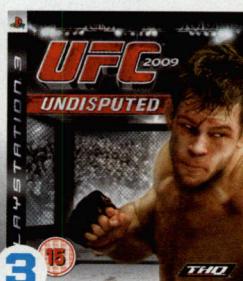
1 The Chronicles Of Riddick: Assault On Dark Athena

Vin Diesel is Riddick, the ex-con fighting murderous drones and a psychotic captain on the good ship Dark Athena. Format PS3 ETA 24 April Pub Atari



2 Bionic Commando

Go, go, gadget arm! Nathan 'RAD' Spencer is no ordinary action adventure hero - his bionic limb is both a weapon and a grapple. Perfect for swinging through jungles and kicking post-apocalyptic ass. Format PS3 ETA May Pub Capcom



3 UFC 2009: Undisputed

Cuddling men have never looked so scary. Chuck Liddell and Tito Ortiz are just two of the 100 fighters packed into this mixed martial arts powerhouse. Format PS3 ETA 15 May Pub THQ



Preview



050

The Saboteur

△ Black ◇ White ✕ World ☐ War

By now you might reasonably conclude that you've seen everything WW2 games have to offer, and would happily never storm another French beach. The Saboteur reckons otherwise. Think of it as a cross between GTA, Medal Of Honor and Sin City, and you should get some idea of what its open-world, colour-coded stealth action has in store.

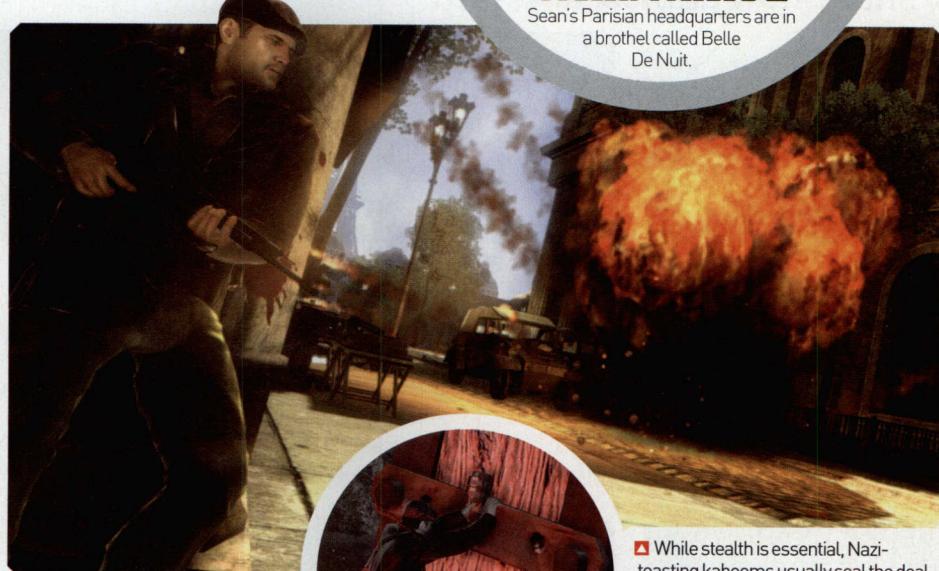
The Saboteur is an ambitious game both in terms of its scale and ideas. You play Sean Devlin, an Irishman fighting alongside the French Resistance in Nazi-occupied Paris – a city literally bled of colour by Hitler's jackbooted boys. As Devlin uses his sabotage skills to liberate areas of the French capital from the fascists, the black and white boulevards will

"As you liberate areas of Paris, they will flood with colour."

flood with colour. If you've seen the film Pleasantville you'll have an idea of what to expect. The return of colour isn't just symbolic, either – with it grows the locals' will to fight. Producer Tom French, explains: "Some people will help you hideout from the Nazis, tougher ones will join the Resistance, and eventually people will even begin fighting the Nazis when Sean does."

Civvy street

Devlin is no ordinary war hero either, he's a race car driver who only gets



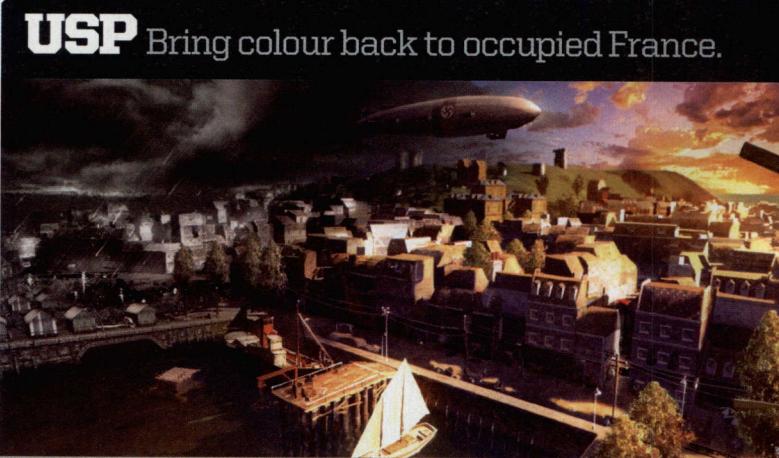
While stealth is essential, Nazi-toasting kabooms usually seal the deal.



involved in the struggle against the Nazis after the murder of a friend. This isn't about being noble and saving the free world, just cold hard revenge. French compares Devlin to actor Colin Farrell. "Not so much the characters he's played in films, but more of his off-screen persona. They're both charming but have scrappy demeanours, smoke like chimneys, and could probably drink any of us under the table." He certainly sounds more fun than the usual bleeding-heart WW2 rookies.



Of course Devlin's civilian background affects the way he fights. He can use a gun, but his lack of military training means but he's much happier trading punches with Herman. As the game progresses Sean does become a more proficient marksman, but the sabotage nature of the missions means getting shooty is rarely the primary objective. This is, above all, about liberating Paris using stealth. "In our missions we tend to employ a mantra of 'quiet in, loud out,' so it's in the players' best interest to go into an area quietly and escape the area as fast and efficiently as they can," says French, "usually under a hail of bullets!"



USP Bring colour back to occupied France.

Quick pitch

Driven man

Hero Sean is based on WW2 race driver William Grover-Williams, who aided the French Resistance for the British military.

Gun show

Weapons are based on real WW2 models, but there are some 'experimental' guns too.

World Whore 2

Sean's Parisian headquarters are in a brothel called Belle De Nuit.



The Latest On...

New shots, new games, new info



Ruse

Format PS3 ETA Winter Pub Ubisoft

It's a new real-time strategy game set in WW2 [wait] in which the key tactic is lying. To win you need to trick the enemy with decoy tanks, concealed troops and surprise attacks. You can even get a sneak peak at your opponent's moves.



Free Realms

Format PS3 ETA Winter Pub Sony

Sony's MMO is free to play, but if you pony up for a monthly sub (\$4.99 in the US, UK price to be confirmed) you can unlock five exclusive character classes, two extra character profiles and 400 extra items and quests. Free it is then.



Blacklight

Format PS3 ETA 2010 Pub TBC

A new tactical shooter accidentally outed by a Hollywood film deal. Set 25 years in the future and described as a sci-fi Apocalypse Now, it follows a spec op squad sent to track down a rogue general. Who the hell greenlit this?



Max Payne 3

Format PS3 ETA Winter Pub Rockstar

Older, meaner and hairier, Max is back for more bullet-time gunplay in Rockstar's cult noir shooter. No info yet but the 'beardy tramp' look suggests he's not NYPD anymore, and has gone freelance with the violent retribution.



Alpha Protocol

Format PS3 ETA October Pub Sega

The much-delayed spy RPG is now set for an October release. It's also looking more like Syphon Filter than Bond, with a body armour-clad hero making machine gun assaults on enemy bases that are heavy on the sandbag décor.



Ghostbusters

Format PS3 ETA 19 June Pub Atari

That megawatt smile belongs to Charmed actress Alyssa Milano, who plays Bill Murray's in-game squeeze. She plays Dr Alyssa Selwyn, the curator of a 'World of Gozer' exhibit who comes down with a bad case of possession.

There's more...

Retro horror revival *Splatterhouse* has been taken away from developer Bottlerocket by Namco, whose EVP of US operations, Makato Iwai said, "The only reason publishers pull the project from the developer is when [they aren't] really meeting the requirements."

Bottlerocket responded, saying it had "not missed any contractually defined milestones", and that perhaps Namco's management of the project was "inept". Easy now. The chances of a multi-format release for 360 action RPG sequel *Mass Effect 2* are looking ever slimmer with all current announcements avoiding any mention of PS3. Even after EA promised. Well, hinted. New *Lego Indiana Jones* and *Harry Potter* games have been accidentally confirmed through a game animator's CV. The voice of Snake and Watchman scriptwriter David Hayter has formed *Dark Hero Studios*, a production company to make games, movies and TV shows. Finally, *The Beatles: Rock Band* will feature 45 tracks from their 1962 to 1969 EMI albums and utilise instruments modelled after the band's iconic gear. There will also be a range of game and controller bundles available, so if you want to play guitar, you can play guitar.

infamous

Format PS3 ETA June Pub Sony

After playing for a few hours two things are clear. One: zipping around the city, climbing and jumping like a warp-speed Altair, is big fun. Two: people are *really* forgiving when you have god-like superpowers. Wipe out a whole street one minute to go all red and evil, then rescue a few civvies and you're good again. The powers are also great fun, although it's disappointing to find out they're *all* electrical.



▀ Sick of switching energy suppliers, Cole took matters into his own hands.

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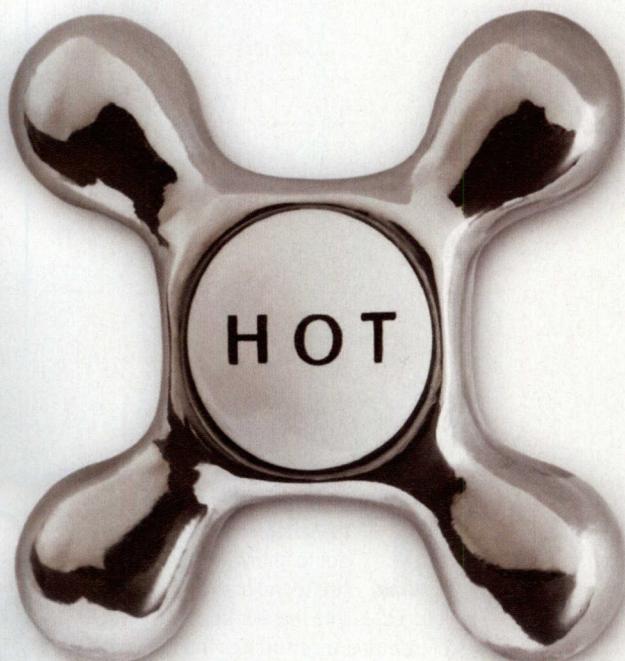
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The Sisters

of mercy

Ten years on and **Bioshock 2** is keeping it in the family. This time, *you're the daddy...*

The original Bioshock couldn't have been much of a harder act to follow without setting fire to the stage as it exited. It lured us into the extraordinary world of Rapture, a city built at the bottom of the sea by a deranged capitalist and populated with his pick of society's elite. But his dream of a new world free from government intervention went gruesomely wrong with the discovery of Adam, a form of primitive stem cell with the ability to reconfigure the human body's DNA to taste. In a few short, brutal years, his aquatic utopia degenerated into a leaking, broken city, its former inhabitants reduced to mutated, disfigured madmen called Splicers. The only things in Rapture more dangerous than these mutant citizens were the Big Daddies: huge,

faceless golems in old-fashioned diving suits – terrifyingly powerful and utterly devoted to protecting their adopted children, the eerie Little Sisters.

The original Bioshock wasn't about them, though. It was about Rapture's creator, Andrew Ryan, his slimy rival, Frank Fontaine, and the protagonist Jack: an unwitting assassin who arrives at Rapture by accident but is revealed in the final act of the game to be a brainwashed puppet, the phrase 'would you kindly' pulling at his Manchurian Candidate-style strings as he was manipulated to bring Rapture to its ruin. Ten years have passed since then. Ryan and Fontaine are dead and the city is a very different place. A new enemy, the Big Sister, is rebuilding Rapture, using stolen children to create new Little Sisters, which is good news for you. Why? You're a Big Daddy. And not just any one, either. You were the first...



A detailed 3D rendering of the Big Daddy character from the video game Bioshock 2. The character is a large, mechanical figure with a pale, skeletal face, glowing red eyes, and a black, ribbed, latex-like suit. He has a large, circular, glowing red eye on his left shoulder and a mechanical arm with a large, serrated blade on his right arm. He is wearing a bowler hat with three bows and a bowtie. He is holding a long, thin, metallic staff or cane in his right hand. The character is shown from the waist up, looking slightly to the left.

feature

Bioshock 2

WORLD
EXCLUSIVE
FEATURE

PlayStation[®]

057



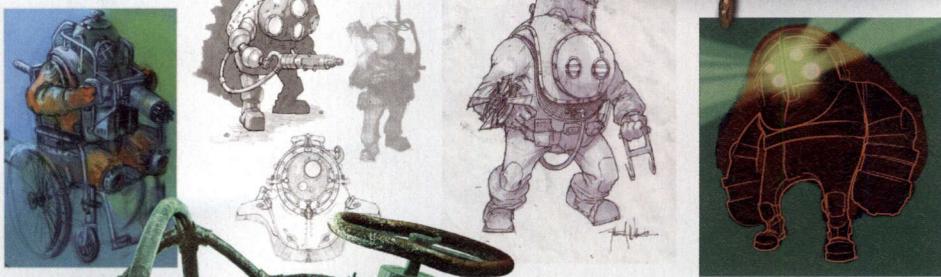
Return to Rapture

The beginner's guide to getting by in the city under the sea

It's been a while since we last visited Rapture, the vast underwater metropolis created by industrialist Andrew Ryan. Intended as a utopia in which science and art could flourish, uncontrolled genetic manipulation saw Rapture overrun by its mutated, demented inhabitants. The city descended into civil war as different factions fought over a precious resource called Adam, and Ryan clashed with a mobster called Fontaine. Bioshock 2 takes place ten years after those events, but before we spill its secrets, let's get up to speed with the bizarre residents of Rapture.

Big Daddy

Created to protect the Little Sisters, these lumbering giants were once human. But the genetic manipulation that gives them their size and strength has devolved them into single-minded bodyguards, mute save for their whale-like calls. There's little humanity left, especially since their skin has been removed so their bodies can be permanently grafted into the suit. Cosy!



Head case
Bouncer variant Big Daddies have deformed heads, requiring larger helmets than the smaller Rosie class.



Who's the daddy?
The original designs always involved a diving suit and the concept of a powerful protective figure. Rosie (top) and Bouncer (bottom) were the results.

Syringe

These syringe guns have been specially designed to help Little Sisters collect the blood they need to create Adam. The storage reservoir has a small teat for them to drink from.

**Little Sister**

Once children, these abominations are now little more than walking Adam factories. The slug that creates this gene-manipulating material only does so in tiny amounts unless implanted into a human host. Because the raw material required is blood from dead bodies, they've been psychologically conditioned to 'enjoy' collecting and drinking it.



Heart breaker
When the Little Sister was just a 'gatherer' designers were told to create something "pathetic that would break the player's heart".



059

Splicers

The majority of Rapture's inhabitants have mutilated both their minds and bodies through excessive Plasmid splicing. They're essentially insane mutated junkies fighting for their next fix.

**Adam**

Unstable stem cells that can be programmed to re-write a human's DNA, giving them powers in the form of Plasmids – a process called splicing. The effects are unstable and addictive, and without increasingly higher doses lead to mental and physical degradation.

**Eve**

Where Adam creates an ability, Eve powers it. Anyone with Plasmids must constantly inject Eve to use their abilities.



Safety catch
This lever activates the plunger for injection.

Plasmids/Gene Tonics

Use Adam to acquire Plasmids – active powers such as throwing fireballs – or Gene Tonics that enhance passive abilities. These are the ones found in the original game...



Alarm Expert Defuses alarms	Armoured Shell Protective skin	Befriend Daddies like you	Blood Lust Attacks heal	Booze Hound Alcohol gives Eve	Vending Expert Reduces prices	Winter Blast Freeze enemies	Target Dummy Deploy a decoy
Electrobolt Fire lightning	Enrage Enemies go crazy	Electric Flesh Less electric damage	Hackers Delight Gain health	Hack Avoid overloads	Incinerate Throw fireballs	Insect Swarm Release the bees!	Medical Expert Better healing
Melee Master Hit harder	Damage Research Hurt enemies more	Security Bullseye Triggers alarms	Security Expert Slows detection	Static Discharge Electrified skin	Telekinesis Move objects	Cyclone Trap Wind attacks	

Daddy cool

It's a brave new world – and this time you're a part of it

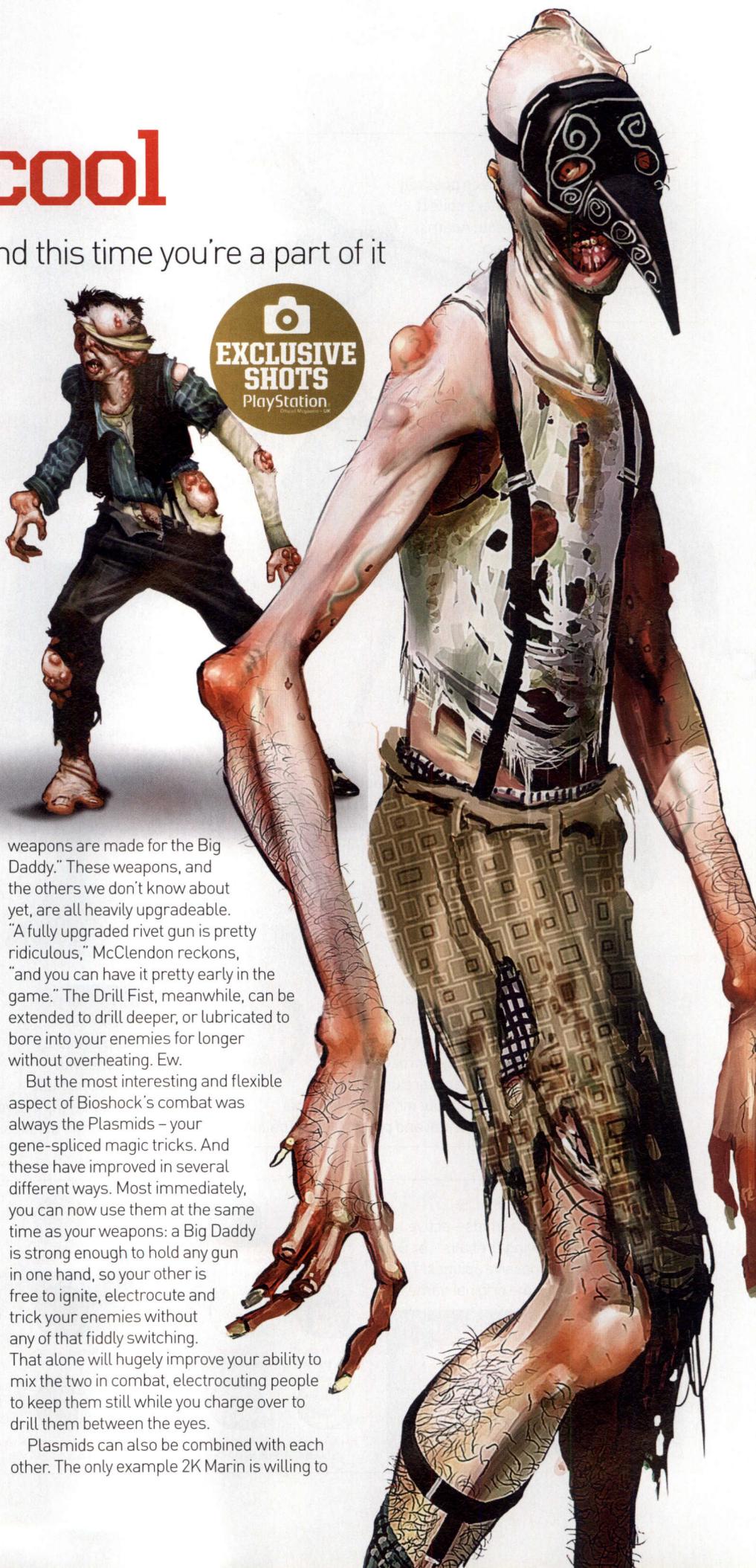
The intervening ten years haven't been kind to Rapture: it's still standing, but barely. Huge sections of it are now completely flooded and its citizens have been forced to mutate further, and even more horrifically, to stay alive. As far as we know, Dr Tenenbaum – the geneticist who invented the Little Sisters – is the only character to survive from the first game. She's ten years older and ten years more bitter, but she's sympathetic to your plight. Namely, to survive whatever Rapture can throw at you.

Then there's you. You're not a normal Big Daddy. You were the first. An experiment to engineer the perfect protector – obedient and powerful. An experiment that failed. Not for lack of power, though: you're as tough as the other Big Daddies, not as slow, and able to use the Adam-fuelled superpowers, Plasmids, that they cannot. But something went wrong. After you, "They decided to simplify," is how the game's creative director Jordan Thomas puts it. The Big Daddies that came after you are the ones you've met before. Unlike them, and unlike Jack from the first game, you have free will. You're not a slave to any psychological conditioning, and 2K Marin – who is developing this sequel rather than Bioshock's original creators 2K Boston/2K Australia – wants to make sure you get to take full advantage of that.

Fight the power

"There was a point [in Bioshock] where we said, ostensibly, you have free will now," says lead designer Zak McClendon, "but the game didn't really change fundamentally." Thomas says they won't make the same mistake again: "We absolutely have a plan to allow the player to breathe out and to, in fact, celebrate his or her free will." What being a Big Daddy means in practical terms, is power. You're no longer using a puttering tommy gun or hefting a wrench. Instead you have a choice between the enormous conical Drill Fist or the Splicer-skewering Rivet Gun. The former bores geysers of blood from a Splicer's face; the latter sends them flying. You can also perform a characteristic Big Daddy charge, which is forceful enough to burst through wooden doors.

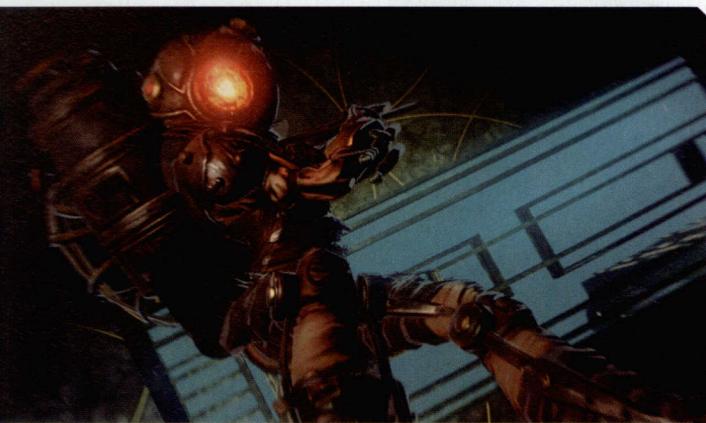
Curiously 2K Marin wouldn't commit to whether you can use the weapons dropped by regular Splicers – the closest we got to an answer was, tellingly, "A lot of the player



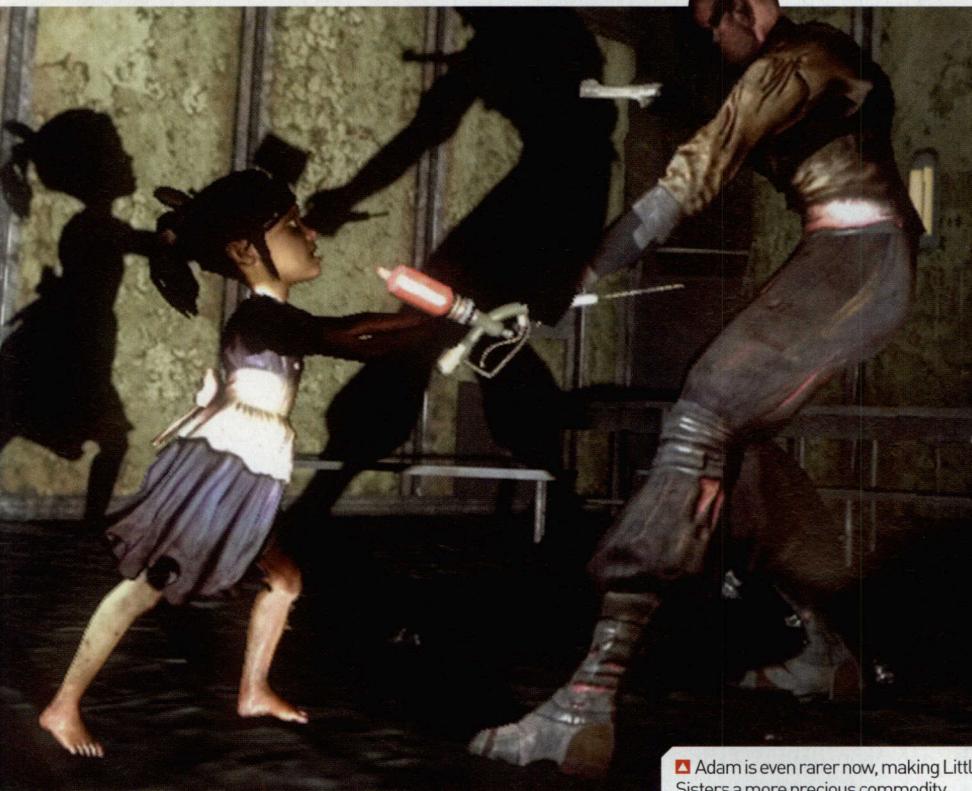
weapons are made for the Big Daddy." These weapons, and the others we don't know about yet, are all heavily upgradeable. "A fully upgraded rivet gun is pretty ridiculous," McClendon reckons, "and you can have it pretty early in the game." The Drill Fist, meanwhile, can be extended to drill deeper, or lubricated to bore into your enemies for longer without overheating. Ew.

But the most interesting and flexible aspect of Bioshock's combat was always the Plasmids – your gene-spliced magic tricks. And these have improved in several different ways. Most immediately, you can now use them at the same time as your weapons: a Big Daddy is strong enough to hold any gun in one hand, so your other is free to ignite, electrocute and trick your enemies without any of that fiddly switching. That alone will hugely improve your ability to mix the two in combat, electrocuting people to keep them still while you charge over to drill them between the eyes.

Plasmids can also be combined with each other. The only example 2K Marin is willing to



■ Level-up the Incinerate Plasmid and you can eject a constant stream of fire.



■ Adam is even rarer now, making Little Sisters a more precious commodity.

■ Repentant creator of the Little Sisters, Dr Tenenbaum, who also discovered Adam, is still in Rapture. Older and more bitter.



talk about so far is Cyclone Trap, the hilarious landmine Plasmid that blasted Splicers into the air when they stepped on it. Now you can use any of your 'elemental' Plasmids to charge the trap once it's laid, "including the element of bees," Thomas laughs.

That means traps that freeze, burn or electrocute enemies, and even make them fight each other or activate Rapture's security systems, thanks to the Enrage and Security Bullseye Plasmids respectively.

Great balls of fire

Plasmids were always upgradeable, but in BioShock the improvements were fairly slight: Incinerate, for example, got a bit of splash damage at level three, but was largely the same as level one. For the sequel, 2K Marin wants your tool set to evolve as you go along. That Cyclone Trap-charging trick is something you can't do until you acquire level two.

"The Drill Fist is used to bore into enemies. Ew."

Incinerate, meanwhile, becomes a different weapon at each level. At level two it can be charged up by holding the trigger, and at level three it becomes a constant stream of flame from your hand, turning you into a human flamethrower. The team wants you to try everything, so the level-one version of most Plasmids is free to acquire. But once you've settled on the ones you like, they want to make sure that specialisation doesn't just mean repetition with better stats – hence the change of control method as Incinerate levels-up.

One of the most unusual things about BioShock was that its best and toughest fights

were the ones you started. The Big Daddies were neutral until attacked, so you could choose when to strike and configure the area to your advantage. All that is still the case in BioShock 2, but what happens between you and the Little Sister afterwards is changed dramatically by who you are. After all, you're her Daddy. The evil option from BioShock remains: choose to 'Harvest' her and you'll extract all the Adam you can – enough to buy a few new Plasmids – but she won't survive the process. But now the alternative is to adopt her. She trusts you implicitly as she's programmed to, so if you offer her your



As a Big Daddy you're engineered to find the Little Sisters appealing, hence their new 'cuter' look.



The Big Sister is super agile and ready to fight for Rapture.

EXCLUSIVE SHOTS
PlayStation



hand she'll happily hop up onto your back.

When you're carrying a Little Sister, any corpses you come across with Adam in them will be highlighted. Wherever and whenever you like, you can set her down and tell her to start 'gathering' – which is basically just a cute word for getting her to stick a needle in a dead body, suck out its blood and then force herself to drink it. "That's it darling, down the hatch."

A Little Sister is vulnerable when she's gathering, though, and the deranged populace of Rapture are more desperate for Adam now than ever. Soon after she goes about her grim work, Splicers will start pouring in from every angle. Most of them will go for you, since you're the threat, but if you leave your Little Sister vulnerable she'll be menaced by her attackers. The onslaught won't stop until she finishes draining the bodies of Adam, so you need to keep the Splicers off her while she works. Because you choose the location of these sieges, and can take as long as you like to prepare for them, they're very much in the vein of the Big Daddy fights. Thomas says, "It's about knowing something is coming and allowing you to use every tool – every bit of planning that you might have developed, and mastery over the systems, to turn that situation to your advantage."

Key games

System Shock (PC, 1994)

Set on a space station, this FPS follows a hacker attempting to defeat an insane AI called SHODAN, intent on destroying Earth. Many of the mechanisms used in Bioshock originated here: mutated enemies, augmented abilities (via neural implants) and tape logs to reveal elements of the backstory.



"The populace of Rapture are desperate."

At the end of these impromptu sieges, you re-adopt your companion and receive all the Adam she's gathered. Or, if you're a terrible, terrible person, you Harvest her and receive all the Adam she's gathered, plus the Adam keeping her alive. If you can resist that temptation long enough to take her to a vent and help her in, the team teases that there are ultimately different, non-Adam rewards for that.

Good parenting

So you're a Big Daddy, using all their weapons and some heavily upgraded Plasmids to take on other Big Daddies, steal their Little Sisters, then fend off hordes of Splicers. It seems very much like you're at the top of the food chain, until you take your third Little Sister from her protector. That's when our cover star, the Big Sister, shows us the only substantial part of Bioshock 2's plot the team is willing to talk about. She's the young girl on the shore in the short but bizarre teaser video released for the game, and while it seemed to suggest we might be heading to dry land, in fact

it was the opposite: she wants to go home.

She may have grown up, but Big Sister never broke free of her programming. Little Sisters are conditioned to understand only what they need to. Adam-rich corpses are good; Big Daddies are good; everything else is bad. In adulthood, that brain-muddling has sent her mildly nuts. She's too old to be a Little Sister, so she's tried to turn herself into a Big Daddy, fashioning a diving suit for herself, building makeshift weapons, and abducting – sorry, adopting – new Little Sisters.

Unlike you, she won't harm Big Daddies: she wants Rapture to stay as it is. But the Little Sisters are dying out, and with Ryan Industries and Fontaine Futuristics thoroughly defunct, no one's replacing them. So Big Sister has been travelling out into the real world, snatching children from their homes and taking them to Rapture to turn them into the darling little blood-drinkers we know and love. If your WTF alarm is going off at this point, that's normal. This is about as much sense as the plot of Bioshock 2 is going to make until we play it. Much of the detail they're holding back isn't secret because they're going to reveal more later, it's because they ➤



System Shock 2 (PC, 1999)

Waking up as an amnesiac soldier you respond to a planetary distress call to discover an alien organism called The Many, which infects and mutates the crew. Using cybernetic implants to improve combat and hacking abilities you must defeat the organism which turns out to be [drum roll] our old friend the AI SHODAN.



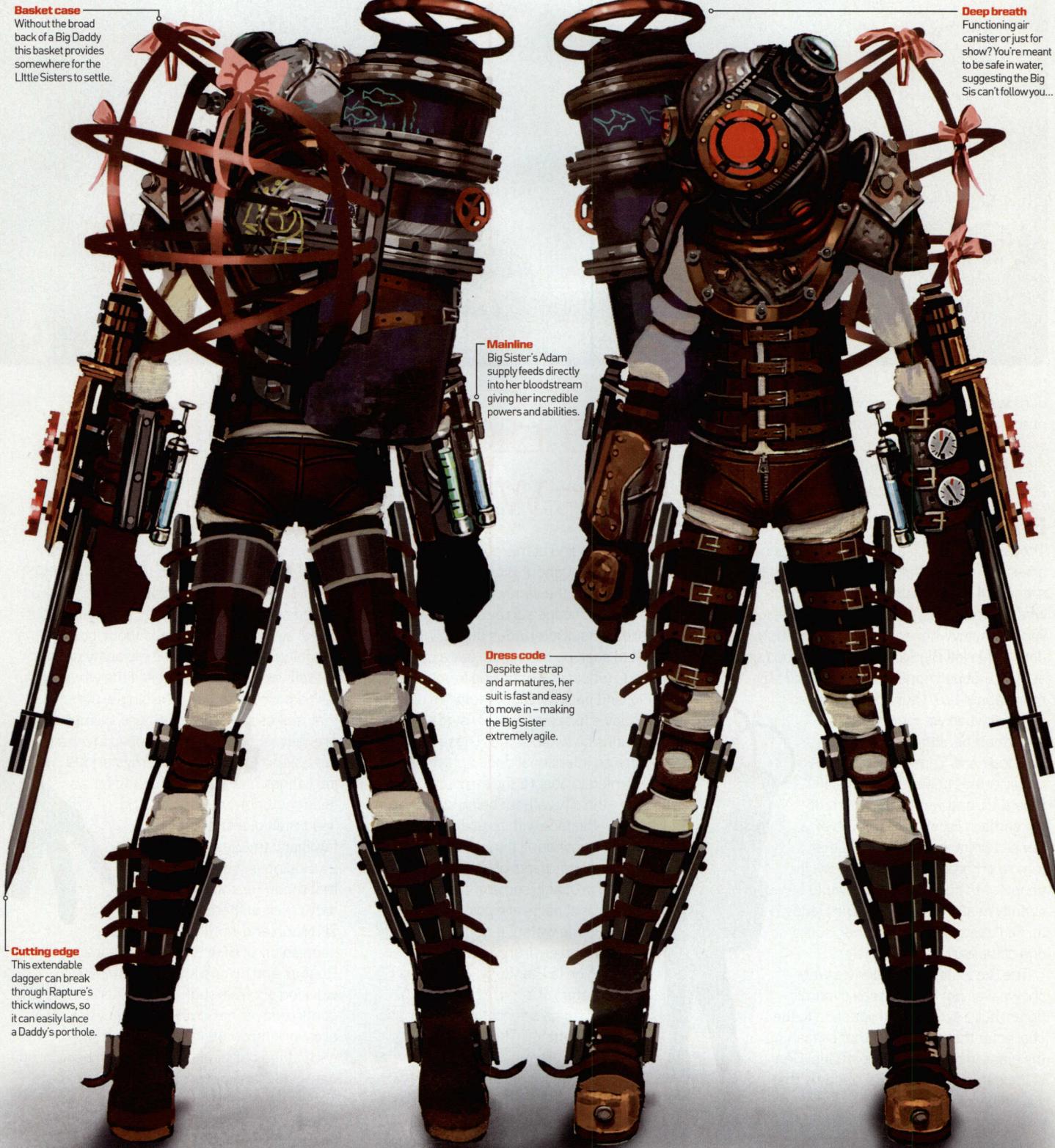
Bioshock (PS3, 2008)

Regarded as the 'spiritual successor' to System Shock 2, it's effectively that game but set under the ocean. Genetic manipulation replaces cybernetics and the main enemy is a megalomaniac industrialist instead of an AI, but the main mechanisms and gameplay are almost identical to SS2.



Know your enemy

She's the Little Sister who grew up, Rapture's deadliest foe... the Big Sister



feature

Bioshock 2

■ Rapture's inhabitants have mutated even further, becoming more monstrous and insane in the process.




EXCLUSIVE SHOTS
PlayStation
Official Magazine - UK

don't want to spoil the story until you play it. In practical terms, all you need know is that for every few Sisters you Save or Harvest, a crazy ninja woman in a diving suit will hunt you down and stab at your face.

Be prepared

That's the cool part, actually. These are not pre-scripted boss fights in specially designed arenas. "The Big Sister comes and finds you wherever you are," Thomas vows, "She'll hunt you down anywhere on a level." Obviously you don't get to kill Big Sister each time you fight – at least, not permanently. 2K wouldn't say much about how your spats with her end, but when we mentioned Vita-Chambers they chuckled a little too hard. Those devices resurrected you when you died in Bioshock, and we've seen them do the same in Bioshock 2. However, a key plot point in the original is that they're programmed to only work for people with specific DNA. It would be awfully neat if you, the first Big Daddy, turned out to be related to her, surely one of the earliest Little Sisters.

The Big Sister encounter we were shown was not one of these dynamic fights, but a scripted introduction to the character that ended with her smashing the glass in one of Rapture's halls. One of the perks of being a Big Daddy is that you're in a pretty substantial diving suit, so the pressure of the entire Atlantic Ocean isn't such a big deal. In fact, it's

"The Big Sister will find you – wherever you are."

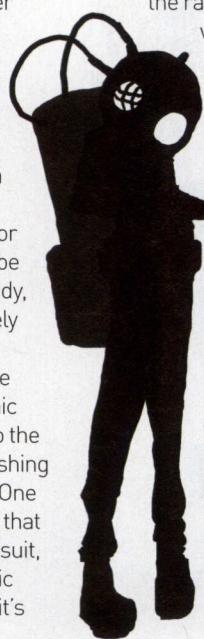
rather pleasant, and at this point – and at many others throughout Bioshock 2 – you get to stomp out onto the sandy ocean floor and explore the landscape surrounding Rapture. These are tranquil interludes during which you'll get to soak up the sights, pay a bit more attention to whoever's nattering in your ear on the radio, and peer through Rapture's dingy windows to see how its twisted society grinds on without you. These sections are an intentional nod to players who wanted to absorb the atmosphere of the city without being smacked in the face with a rebar every 30 seconds. "I think that the really moody parts of Bioshock [2] and probably some of the really emotional parts are going to take place in the water," says flamboyantly named lead environment designer Hogarth de la Plante.

At the start of our presentation, Thomas had said something enigmatic about the setting. "There's obviously been a lot of prequel/sequel argument/rumours," he accurately noted. "If we did a pure one of either of those, we wouldn't be surprising you enough." But everything mentioned so far has

been a straight sequel, ten years after the original story. What aren't they mentioning? It wasn't until much later that Hogarth touched on the subject of multiplayer, and it started to make sense. "We can't talk about it except that it's going to be in the game," is all he'd say.

Well, we can talk about it. If the whole game isn't a pure sequel and the single-player *is*, that makes it pretty clear there's a multiplayer prequel section being developed in parallel. We haven't forgotten those mysterious job listings posted by 2K Boston for a 'lead multiplayer designer' and 'lead multiplayer engineer' familiar with Bioshock.

2K Boston is the main studio that made Bioshock 1, and only seven of them left to form 2K Marin and work on what we've seen so far of Bioshock 2. The rest are still in Boston, and no one knows what they're working on. (Although creator Ken Levine is confirmed as 'not involved'.) If they definitely are working on the multiplayer portion of the game then our biggest wish would be a co-op game built around a team of proto-Splicers fighting to escape during Rapture's early collapse into war. But until this coming winter, all we can do is dream.





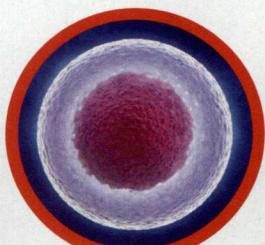
Logan's Run

This futuristic utopia, which imposed a 30-year life span on its inhabitants, is cited as an influence by Bioshock creator Ken Levine: "It represented a society with interesting ideas screwed up by the fact that we're people."



Stem cell research

Adam is a kind of stem cell. These are real cells that have the ability to become any other cell. While they can't enable you to throw a fireball they're thought to have the potential to be a magic cure for everything from cancer to spinal injuries.



City Of Lost Children

While this French film involves kidnapped children, freakish mutants, a secret laboratory built in the ocean and a deep-sea diver who saves a small girl, the real influence is its striking and over-saturated murky green Rapture-like colour palette.



In the mix

The building blocks of Bioshock and Rapture



Atlas Shrugged

Ayn Rand's 1957 beast of a novel establishes the Objectivist philosophy adopted by Rapture's populace. In Rand's own words it's, "The concept of man as a heroic being, his own happiness the moral purpose of his life. Productive achievement his noblest activity, reason his only absolute."



System Shock 2

Bioshock creator Ken Levine designed this FPS sequel which contains many Bioshock elements. There are Quantum Bio-Reconstruction Machines instead of Vita-Chambers and Cyber Modules replace Plasmids. Even the twist is similar: your guide turns out to be the enemy in disguise.

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GAME
The next level

In the mood for... Musicians

"Good evening, PlayStation!" Meet
gaming's maddest, baddest rockers

Music in games evokes atmosphere and triggers an emotional response in the player. But that's kind of boring. Here, we're only interested in eardrum-splitting depravity. Like using the power of ROCK to kill demons. Or defeating invading aliens using only your nimble fingers and a collection of bubblegum pop songs. We're also interested in PlayStation's sexiest, most tortured musical talents. Like discovering that Lucas from spooky thriller Fahrenheit has an unexpected musical streak, or the bonkers pop direction taken by Final Fantasy X-2 that weirded out its own fans. So c'mon people, put your lighters in the air for our gaming supergroup. (Groupies welcomed.)

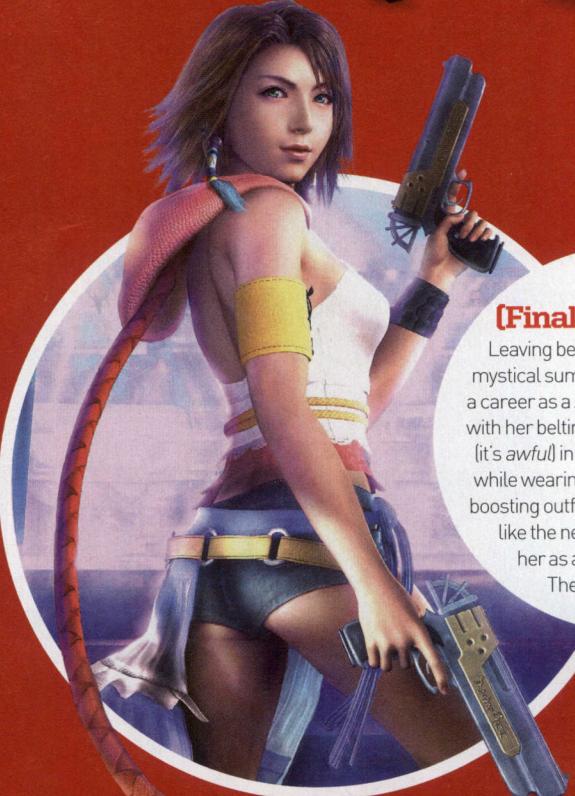
Ulala **(Space Channel 5)**

Aliens are invading (again) and only microskirted TV presenter Ulala can save the day. How? By dancing to a disco and funk soundtrack while taking pot shots at the attacking Morolians with a laser. Lady Miss Kier from Deee-Lite thought Ulala was based on her, but spectacularly failed in her attempt to sue Sega in 2003, costing the singer \$608,000.



Yuna **(Final Fantasy X-2)**

Leaving behind her dull old life as a mystical summoner, Yuna embarks on a career as a J-pop starlet. FFX-2 opens with her belting out her hit Real Emotion (it's awful) in front of a packed stadium while wearing a radical new cleavage-boosting outfit. The hardcore fans didn't like the new direction, preferring her as a mousey wallflower. The massive babies.



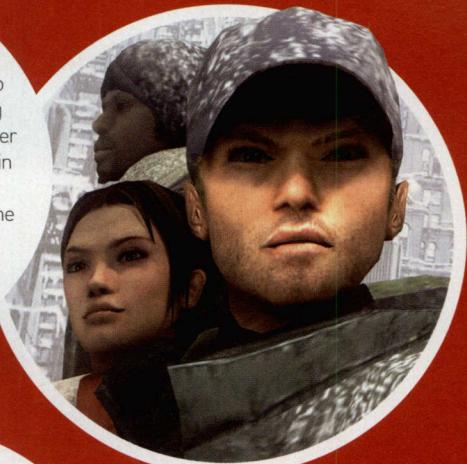
intermission

A tasty PlayStation snack



Lucas (Fahrenheit)

When his ex-girlfriend comes over to pick up her stuff, rather than making small talk (or crying while tugging at her coat sleeve) Lucas plies Tiffany with gin and busts out the guitar. Strum a note-perfect song and it'll get you some nostalgic bedroom action. Choose something romantic, though – the bossa nova option won't loosen any buttons.



Love Fist (GTA: Vice City)

Part Scottish Spinal Tap, part walking knob gag, the band are Jezz Torrent, Willy, Dick and Percy. Memorable song titles include the likes of Four Boys Against Your Face, Take It On The Chin, Zinc Deficiency and Fist Till Morning. The band kept Tommy Vercetti plenty busy in Vice City, organising hookers, gig security and, erm, avoiding car bombs.



Parappa (Parappa The Rapper)

This rapping dog's phat skills saw him defeat the town bully, Joe Chin, and win the heart of beautiful girl-dog Sunny Funny. Among other things, he used rap to learn kung-fu from an onion, work in a burger bar and sell tat at a flea market.

Which makes him a dog of all trades (provided all trades involve rapping).



Dante (Devil May Cry 3)

After defeating the Succubus in Devil May Cry 3, Dante earns the right to use Nevan, a magical electrical guitar. By performing solos and fiery licks, bursts of electricity blast from the instrument and rip enemies apart. It can even summon angry bats, and doubles as a handy scythe. Disappointingly though, it's not an actual axe – missed a trick there, Capcom.

Now have your say

Have we missed your favourite musically-gifted character? Let us know at opm@futurenet.com. Ones we almost picked...

■ Chopin (Eternal Sonata). This JRPG takes place in Chopin's dying dreams where he uses his conductor's baton to orchestrate enemies to death.

■ The Devil (GH III). Turns out your band manager is the devil and wants your soul. Cue: The Devil Went Down To Georgia...

feature

Online marathon

PS
070



WARNING Do not try this at home. See page 81 for medical advice.

24 HRS

A close-up photograph of a man with a beard and a woman with her hands on his head, looking up.

feature

Online marathon



What better way to take the pulse of the PlayStation Nation than by playing PS3 games online for 24 hours? And so the madness began...

ON PSN



feature

Online marathon

We call it PSN 24. It's like the codename for a war, and like most wars, none of us can really remember why or how it began. Something to do with Killzone 2's European launch and a double XP weekend on Call Of Duty 4. And we prepare for it like war. Seven of us are taking part – the entire OPM editorial team – and we all need to be fully equipped. Spare games have to be sourced. Networks setups checked and re-checked. And then the patching – night after night of updates and progress bars to make sure we have the latest versions of each game and are fully online functional.

By the time the big day arrives each member of the team has downloaded over two Gigs of patch data. We have each assembled a full stock of the 18 games selected for the day's play, and each have in our possession an intricate, colour-coded schedule detailing the minute-by-minute timing of game sessions and personal breaks from our start time of 08:00 on Friday to 08:00 on Saturday. We rise early, salute the sun, and log in. This is PSN 24...

Twitter #PSN24

cupcake_rachel I'm up, I'm up! Off to have a shower, eat some poached eggs and prep my

08:01

We begin the day in **Home**. It's bright and clean, and a convenient place to wait for everyone to get online. Avatars reveal some interesting choices: Ben has a massive beard matching the one he's been growing in actual real life, Leon is dressed as Nite Owl from Watchmen, Tim is rocking a Patrick Bateman suit and gloves combo, and Nath is a small lady with pigtails. We briefly consider trying to get a bowling lane, but then remember that shooting people is way more fun.

THE OPM PLAYERS

Staying awake is their speciality



Nathan Ditum



Rachel Penny



David Boddington



James Jarvis



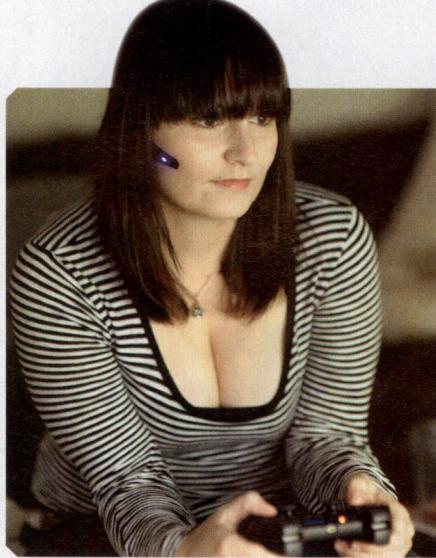
Tim Clark



Ben Wilson



Leon Hurley



Perfect fringe, absence of cookie crumbs and tears indicate this snap was taken early on in the proceedings.

08:37

We struggle briefly while trying to set up **Resistance 2** with what will become the day's major bugbear – figuring out how to send invites to each other – but are soon underway with a game of co-op. As the only

thumbs for a day of abuse. **leonHurley** Oh God this is really

men who've played it before, Nath and Leon choose to be medics in a bid to keep everyone alive, while Ben and Dave rock the special ops and Tim, Ratchet and James are soldiers. Not everyone seems sure of their roles (Ratchet, halfway through: "I have a shield?"), but it's a massive success, with the constant chatter – 'Hang back, medics,' 'Shield ammo low,' 'HEALMEHEALME!' – fostering a sense of joy and togetherness. One which fades like a dying star as the day grinds on, obviously, but

LieutenantFatman, Johnboy, Jenivere – which means that even though we receive a savage beating, it's not as public as it could've been. We even manage to shoot some people. "Three kills!" Ben reports. "I even got Leon!"

11:23

Then it's on to **Crash Commando**, which splits the team right down the middle. Nath, Leon and Ben love the dinky arcade bloodletting and quickly settle into throwing grenades into each other's faces. But the others aren't convinced, mostly because of the voice chat, which leaves us repeating 'Hello? Can you hear me? I can hear you...' over the headsets like a squadron of fighter planes lost in the Bermuda Triangle. All this, along with the fact we've accidentally made objective games we don't understand instead of simple deathmatches, means the game is given short shrift (Tim: "I'm out. Total balls"). PES is next.



"It was a rollercoaster of dizzying highs and terrifying lows, but playing Street Fighter IV was the exact moment I hurtled burning off the tracks and into the night. The game had been out for just over a week, but the kids had got really good, really fast. Defeat followed miserable defeat as I stared down at my treacherously slow, old man hands, burning with shame at the carefully modded arcade stick on my lap. Then, finally, I was matched with a man (or possibly a child) I could beat. He alternated between Ryu and Dhalsim, while I stuck with Vega and my most reliable stuffed-crust combos. It was always close, but I consistently came out on top, edging a string of 2-1 victories before rejoining the rest of the OPM pack as we prepared to move on to the next game. "The kids are all savants and keep smashing me up," complained Dave. "How did you get on?" I consider my response for a couple of seconds. "I think I might be amazing at it."

happening isn't it? **NathanDitum** Finished top of kill counts

in every round of Resistance 2, even the ones we lost

because I was going mad. Winner! Right? ►



tim

PSN ID: OPM_Tim TV: Pioneer PDP-5080XD Snack: Peanut brittle Drink: Orange squash



feature

Online marathon

"I flirted with madness several times during the day (the google chat transcription of me directing the others into a FIFA lobby like obstinate sheep has been sealed for all time and would ruin me professionally should it ever be made public). But happily my brain is excellent at suppressing bad thoughts and so more than anything else I remember the massive highlight that was Burnout. I had both my kids on the sofa with me and my boy would swap in every few minutes to take the others down, his face lighting up every time a gurning mugshot flashed on-screen. It's how games should be played – with friends, family, and for less than three hours at a time.

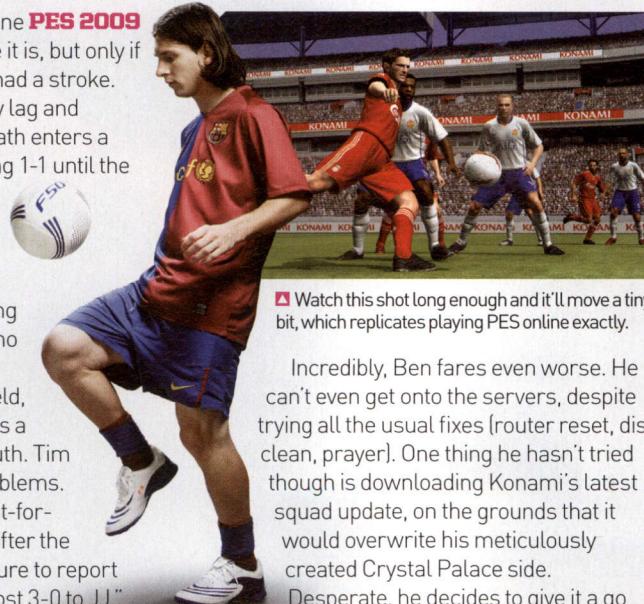
nathan

PSN ID OPM_Nath TV Sony Bravia KDL-46W2000 Snack Liquorice Allsorts Drink Tea

cupcake_rachel Not again! Aaaargh! I can confirm Nathan is a massive Resistance 2 bully!

12:00

We quickly discover that online **PES 2009** isn't like real PES. Or maybe it is, but only if real PES had fallen over or had a stroke. The games are torn apart by lag and inexplicable AI behaviour. Nath enters a random game and is drawing 1-1 until the last minute, when his goalkeeper rushes out to collect a back pass and simply keeps on running – past the ball, past the chasing striker, past the defender who played the ball in the first place and out into the midfield, as if he'd been told there was a bomb buried in the goalmouth. Tim and James have similar problems. "PES online is a laggy, not-fit-for-purpose mess," Tim types after the game. "It gives me no pleasure to report that. And it's not because I lost 3-0 to JJ."



Watch this shot long enough and it'll move a tiny bit, which replicates playing PES online exactly.

Incredibly, Ben fares even worse. He can't even get onto the servers, despite trying all the usual fixes (router reset, disc clean, prayer). One thing he hasn't tried though is downloading Konami's latest squad update, on the grounds that it would overwrite his meticulously created Crystal Palace side. Desperate, he decides to give it a go

timothydclark Have had to wee three times already. What's

anyway, while we wait for an update over google chat. "Well," he reports furiously a few seconds later, "that wiped my Palace stuff AND it still won't let me play. There's no swear word to describe this anger." Not strictly true, but all things considered we move on early.

12:39

More sadness. The men of PES take their turn for lunch ('lunch' in this case actually meaning 'some early Call Of Duty 4') while Leon, Ratchet and Dave re-enter the fray with **Calling All Cars**, which is still one of our favourite PSN games. Offline, anyway. Online, it's a total bust. We try making lobby after lobby, but can never manage to get more than two people into the same room. The matchmaking feels like an elaborate riddle that was never meant to be solved, and within half an hour the whole team is playing COD4.

leon

PSN ID: leonHurley TV: Samsung LE32S86BDX Snack: Organic chocolate Drink: Tea



"I knew the late stint was going to push people. I just didn't know how hard. By 3am we were playing COD4 in chilling silence. No chatter beyond the rattle of gunfire and the occasional weary breath. Even the lobbies were filled with a cold-blooded silence. We were just doing the business and getting the job done. The scary thing is how much better I played. I just sort of zoned out for a bit and came round at the end of a match with 70-something kills. I'm not entirely sure how, either. There was just a knackered, ruthless efficiency to the whole process: see target, shoot target, stagger on."

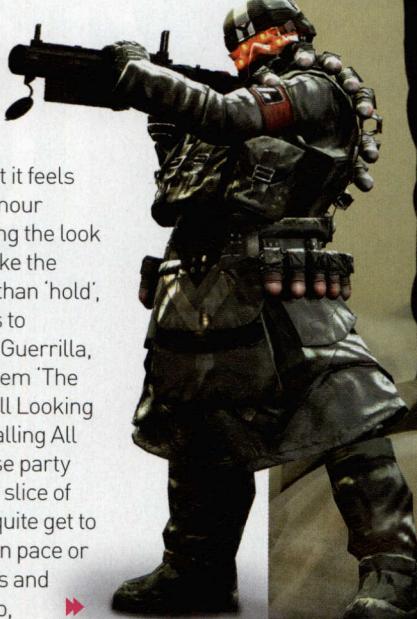


075

wrong with me? **leonHurley** Must kill more aliens while altruistically supporting
teammates! **cupcake_rachel** Calling All Cars update... still broken.

14:05

The problem with playing **Killzone 2** right after an illicit session of COD4 is that it feels heavy like wearing armour underwater. We all bang the look sensitivity up to 11, make the aiming 'toggle' rather than 'hold', and switch the buttons to 'Alternate 2' (honestly, Guerrilla, you may as well call them 'The COD Controls You're All Looking For'). After PES and Calling All Cars, the simple-to-use party system feels like a tiny slice of heaven, but we never quite get to grips with the change in pace or the bewildering badges and levelling options and so, ➤



No wonder we're the only people on it. ➤

feature

Online marathon

shamefully, end up ditching it early. It's brilliant, but also a lot like the pretty new girlfriend you spoil things with because you can't stop thinking about your ex. It's not you, Killzone, it's us. Anyway, the man from Liverpool Studio is online and he wants to beat us at Wipeout.

15:19

By this stage our enjoyment and wider mental wellbeing have become heavily reliant on the design and user-friendliness of the online menus in each new game we play. Each boot-up is a leap into the unknown, each disc inserted a roll of the tantrum dice. **Wipeout HD** comes up double six – Nath sets up a lobby and we've found him in seconds. We make a tournament and the races begin – races won, with barely an exception, by Gareth Betts, the game's senior producer. Gareth

■ **Wipeout** – pretty and fast. Exactly the kind of qualities we're used to handling at 4am. We're here all night.



■ Motorstorm: Pacific Rift is a cruel mistress – team OPM manages to race for an hour without ever winning.

doesn't have a headset, which is a real shame because Wipeout's super-pretty design and calming lady robot voice restore our spirits after a few hours of niggling frustration, and we'd like to tell him so. Nath wins a single race, and after we're done. Gareth sends him a message, "I hope you enjoyed the lesson." We did.



16:59

With tea-time looming we move on to **Motorstorm: Pacific Rift**, and our guest developer is the game's lead designer, Paul Rustchynsky. He reminds us of Wipeout's Gareth Betts for the following two reasons: he doesn't have a headset either, and he wins every race by several seconds, even though some of the kids we're racing against are also pretty bloody amazing. Despite the calming break that was Wipeout, by this stage our already-short attention spans have entirely shrivelled up like the cold dead leaves of winter and tempers are beginning to flare at even the slightest provocation. Tim leaves the game abruptly with half an hour of scheduled play time still remaining. "I can't listen to the Motorstorm music anymore," he says. Then Ben's net connection decides to give out on him (a deeply ominous sign of things to come) as though the gods were punishing him for being the only one of us who wasn't completely balls at Pacific Rift (he came third, once). ▶

timothydclark Third pint of orange squash. Maybe fourth? Fifth wee. Wipeout now with studio

liverpool. :) **OPM_UK #psn24** Nathan matches man from

"I still get the flashbacks. I've been awake for what seems like an eternity. It's 5am, I'm flat on my stomach in a decaying bus in the arse-end of war-torn nowhere, trying to avoid the bursts of gunfire pinging off the rusty seats above me. I want to cry. I'm just so tired... But then my headset crackles into life with the chatter of my teammates organising a counter offensive. I reload. The brave men and women of the OPM readership proved themselves time and again during those dark, dark hours of PSN24. We salute you!"



david

PSN ID: OPM_Dave TV: Panasonic Viera TX-32LXD85 Snack: Chocolate Swiss rolls Drink: Coke Zero

Liverpool Studios' tournament ranking at Wipeout HD! Much OPM pride.



James_Jarvis Having a snack before Motorstorm and hoping

the PS3 won't mind being on for over 24 hours straight. ►

"22 hours in and the end is in sight. After a few minutes of tired and not-all-together-helpful discussions, the final chapter in this seemingly never-ending story was to be filled with two hours of Wipeout. Racing around the beautifully clean tracks with the soft techno soundtrack trickling into my ears was like entering the chillout room at an all-night rave. Maybe it was the fact that voice chat was kept to a minimum, or that nobody (bar Nathan) seemed bothered about winning anymore, but this was the calm after the storm and it was pure bliss."

james

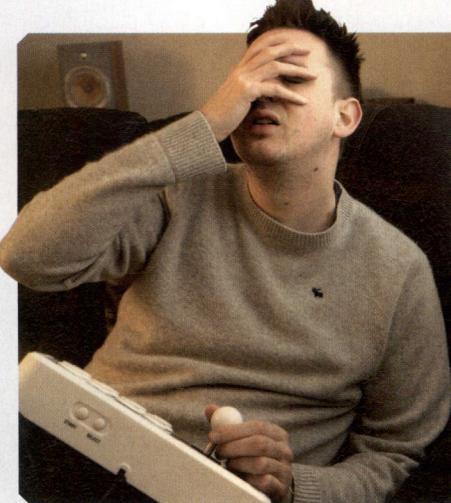
PSN ID: OPM_James TV: Samsung PS42E7HDX Snack: Sea salt and black pepper crisps Drink: Orange Fanta

feature

Online marathon

18:04

After the day we've had, the relief of getting online with **Burnout Paradise** is like angels pulling us from a burning crevasse and carefully massaging us with Jesus' own-brand ointment: *you just press right on the D-pad*. And then it works! For this reason, plus the fact that the game itself is brilliant, and our free pizzas arrive while we were playing (thanks, Domino's!), **Burnout** is the day's highlight so far. We're online with Craig Sullivan from Criterion, who not only has a headset, but also a camera for post-takedown mugshots. He insisted beforehand that we all make sure we have our own, too, which might sound oddly demanding, but makes total sense in the midst of our frantic games of



Even his precious modded stick can't help Tim on the brutal plains of the Street Fighter IV servers.

leonHurley **Burnout Paradise** hates me. The pizza which just arrived does not. **timothydclark**



Marked Man (we don't care about the road rule challenges, only delicious takedowns) when snaps of furious victims start pinging to and fro among our machines. Played like this, the game is a revelation – munching on greasy pepperoni and making faces at each other is one of the day's standout moments, and we're sad to leave.

19:53

Street Fighter IV is tremendous online – because the game's brilliant anyway, but also because there's barely any lag. Our only complaint is that we'd like the option to join a big party room where players could arrange individual fights or choose to spectate on others. As it is we make do with hopping from one bout to the next – Nath and Tim swapping wins early on, Ben racking up a string of

eight-player Marked Man in **Burnout Paradise** one of the day's

victories and Dave getting a solid beating from GamesRadar's guest-starring Nathan Irvine. ("I love SFIV," types Dave, sadly, "but I'm so crap at it.") Further signs of mental deterioration emerge: Nath stops playing for ten minutes just to listen to the menu music, while the team has its first discussion about the possibility of switching out several games scheduled for early morning for COD4. Quietly, Ben's internet dies.



an online room through the game's excruciating menu system, but parlaying them over google chat quickly descends into a nightmare of misery and misunderstanding (it's now burned into memory: Online Game Modes, Online Game Modes, **FIFA 09** Match Creation, Online Lobbies, press **PS** twice, scroll to the bottom and press right until you find OPM... 'easy'). Then we hear the dev team are having trouble at their end – they arrive 15 minutes late, by which time we've been in the menus for 45 minutes. "I'm close to tears," says Tim. Finally, after an hour wrestling with lobbies, we start the match. And it crashes. Howls of indignation and madness light up the google chat, as EA apologetically explain their kit isn't compatible with ours. In hollow desperation we set up a game of three on two, with Nath and Ben taking on Dave, Tim and James. Ben's internet gives out again at 2-1 up, and a near-maniac Nath giggles his way to a 7-2 victory against a backdrop of silent fury from the others. "I wish I was in bed. Or COD. Or heaven," Tim claims.

21:40

The main event. Yes! It's **Call Of Duty 4** time. We're supposed to be meeting Infinity Ward's Robert Bowling at ten, and we're on early to warm up and take advantage of the double XP weekend. He accepts our friend request but we never hook up for a game. We tell ourselves he must be overwhelmed with



OPM DEV FRIENDS

They turn up, beat us, then leave



Paul Rustchynsky
Senior designer, SCEA Evolution Studios

"Not having played against any journalists before, I didn't quite know what to expect, but it turns out I had nothing to fear. With five gold medals in the bag after five races I was spending more time looking in my rear mirror, but at least that upped the challenge! Maybe next time guys :-)"



Craig Sullivan
Creative director, Criterion Games

"Playing online in **Burnout** was great, although it proved to be a disturbing insight into the lives of OPM. As we started I could hear over the headset that pizza had arrived and Tim was having some kind of episode with his neighbour – it was time for me to leave the game. Thanks for the invite, see you online soon."



Gareth Betts
Producer, SCEA Studio Liverpool

"The time: 16:00 Friday 27 Feb, the place: Wipeout HD's Anulpha Pass. Those OPM folks sure know how to write an article, but anti-grav pilots they ain't. James did manage to pip me by the seventh or eighth race, but overall – better luck next time!"



02:30

At this point we're in trouble like a ship caught in a continent-drowning storm, and we start throwing games out of the schedule like ballast. To steady us up we turn to something we've all played and loved online before – **GTA IV**. But somehow we're doing it wrong. We can't find a party the same size as ours to play against, and we end up first running around a big empty airport while glitching kids shoot us through the walls of the terminal, and then in a slightly more exciting game of shotguns in the park with sniggering hicks. ►

"Turns out at 4am when the biscuits have run out, your eyes are burning and even the cat has given up and gone to sleep, seeing your friends in their pyjamas is the answer. I was cold, grumpy and pretty tired after wasting precious hours of my life playing GTA IV online with a bunch of shotgun wielding rednecks ("I done shot me a man!"), but hooking up for a video chat cheered me up no end, and was maybe even the best part of the night. Partly it was seeing everyone a little bit crumpled, partly it was knowing that we were all in it together, but if I'm honest, it was mainly seeing my boss sitting there in his space invader jammies."

absolute high points. Big up to @criteriongames @sargesullivan **cupcake_rachel** Terrifying

crash and database rebuild mid Street Fighter! Could not

have been more scared if house was on fire! ►

079



A woman with dark hair and bangs is lying in bed, looking towards the camera. She is wearing a dark top and striped pajama bottoms. A black cat is sitting on the bed next to her. In the bottom right corner, there is a small image of a man from the video game GTA IV. The word "rachel" is written in large, white, block letters across the bottom of the image.

PSN ID OPM_Rachel TV Panasonic Viera TH-37PX80B Snack Chocolate chip cookies Drink Diet Red Bull

feature

Online marathon

"Fittingly, my low point of the day came halfway through our allotted time on Street Fighter IV - the only game where I was smashing every opponent I faced. With no prior warning my router conked out and I spent the following three hours desperately trying to connect to COD4 while volleying compound swear words that I had no idea were in my vocabulary towards Orange's Indian call centre. I eventually managed *one half* of FIFA at 1.30am before giving up for good, but as Nath and I were 2-1 up at the time I did at least retire unbeaten. Sort of."

leonHurley Getting a second wind, possibly. Or could just be the first beer. **timothydclark** Birds already singing outside.



ben

PSN ID OPM_Ben TV Sony Bravia KDL-40S3000 Snack White mice Drink Cherry Coke

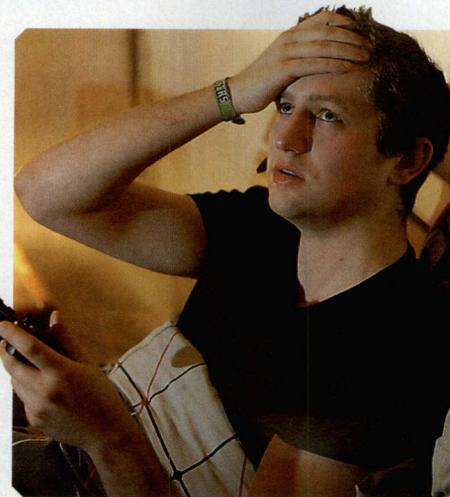
"We are playing actual rednecks," types Rachel, as morale plunges to new lows.

03:16

We regroup in a camera chat, now all pallid faces and pyjamas. It's a mixture of sadness and indecision. We want to play zombies in Call Of Duty: World At War but there are too many of us. We consider more COD4, but also realise we need to play other games. Wipeout is suggested. Warhawk is dismissed as too complex, too late. Suddenly a decision seems to have reached itself – we're playing World At War.

03:29

The little feathery twats. **OPM_UK** Ridiculous day ends with



Too late James realises the disastrous effect the gaming marathon will have on his electricity bill.

With Ben now an official casualty, we play three-on-three **Call Of Duty: World At War**, despite the apparent consensus that we'd like to do some matchmaking to level-up. Leon's unlocked all the guns and makes everyone furious by killing them. Ratchet 'hides' for a suspicious amount of time, which she claims is tactical, but seems a lot like cover for sleep.

04:49

We're still playing **Call Of Duty 4** – just to stay awake. Leon's PS3 collapses and needs to rebuild its own hard drive. Rachel's cat meows and meows through her headset. We're barely speaking to each other, just shooting and running, constantly moving. Like sharks. Sharks of 24-hour gaming.

06:44

The sun dawns on a morning which has long since forgotten the meaning of joy and smiles and life.

THE VERDICT

Did we like what we played?



Metal Gear Online

Kojima's stealthy take on the deathmatch template is surprisingly satisfying.



Resistance 2

Solid as alien oak in traditional deathmatch, but an absolute revelation in eight-player co-op.



Wipeout HD

Blush-inducingly pretty and, in the league format, a pleasure to play. Shame about the comms.



Crash Commandos
Created a schism between those who literally LOL'd and those who found it a fiddly bore.



Motorstorm: Pacific Rift

Left us cold, perhaps because it's dominated by boost savants.



GTA IV

Couldn't get a match in the more interesting modes, leaving only the undercooked deathmatches.



Call Of Duty: World At War

Far more satisfying than the flawed single-player offering.



Burnout Paradise

Brilliant fun – especially in Marked Man mode – and the best implemented interface.



PES 2009

Utterly bedevilled by lag and a lack of different modes or party options. Not fit for purpose.



Calling All Cars

Simply didn't work. Sadly, the online mode appears to have been left to rot on the vine.



FIFA 09

Impressively stable and options aplenty, but shrouded in menus that are a Byzantine nightmare.



Killzone 2

A meaty, chunky and uniquely flavoured FPS. Impressive, but we still need time to acclimatise.



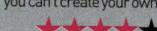
Call Of Duty 4

Hoorah for the fastest, deepest, and most unapologetically brutal online experience on PS3.



Street Fighter IV

Handles the spectre of lag better than we dare hoped, but a pity you can't create your own party.



silently on, blinking out one by one like tired, ancient stars. JJ, then Dave, then Leon, then finally, at one minute past eight, Rachel. We're done.

Aftermath

Long before the eight o'clock finish, we had all realised that playing games for more than a few hours – let alone an entire day – was not only unfun, but also a health hazard. The entire team takes the Monday off to recover, and when we meet back at work on Tuesday we receive a lengthy, sternly-worded reply from a doctor we contacted for medical advice about the event. He regards the plan to play computer games for 24 hours with only short breaks as potentially very hazardous, and provides quite a few pages of alarming evidence. He then advises that the plan should be abandoned.

Wipeout 'because it's prettiest'. Thanks to all who joined in.



We simply have to stop shooting each other, and after 27 minutes of google chat discussion, decide to finish with **Wipeout HD**. Nath wins the first tournament, but his children are awake so he bails out just after seven. "I can't keep sending the kids upstairs and play and not go mad," he explains. "I'm too tired." Tim eliminates himself from nearly every race by smashing his ship from wall to wall like a flaming coffin going down the Cresta run, then drops out a few minutes later. The others play

Too late, doc. He's right, of course, and beyond the knowledge that we never want to do anything like this again it's hard to pinpoint exactly what we've learnt. That patching is a pain in the ass, obviously. That every game *absolutely needs* a simple, easy-to-use lobby and invite system, and the ones that do – Resistance, Burnout, COD4, Wipeout – are usually head and shoulders above the rest in terms of online play. That we should play with our lovely readers again as soon as possible, even if it's just so we can win this time. And more than anything, that PSN offers loads and loads of incredible, potentially endless gaming experiences, but that playing it for 24 hours is a lunatic's way of enjoying it. The only thing we have to cling to in the end is that we did it.

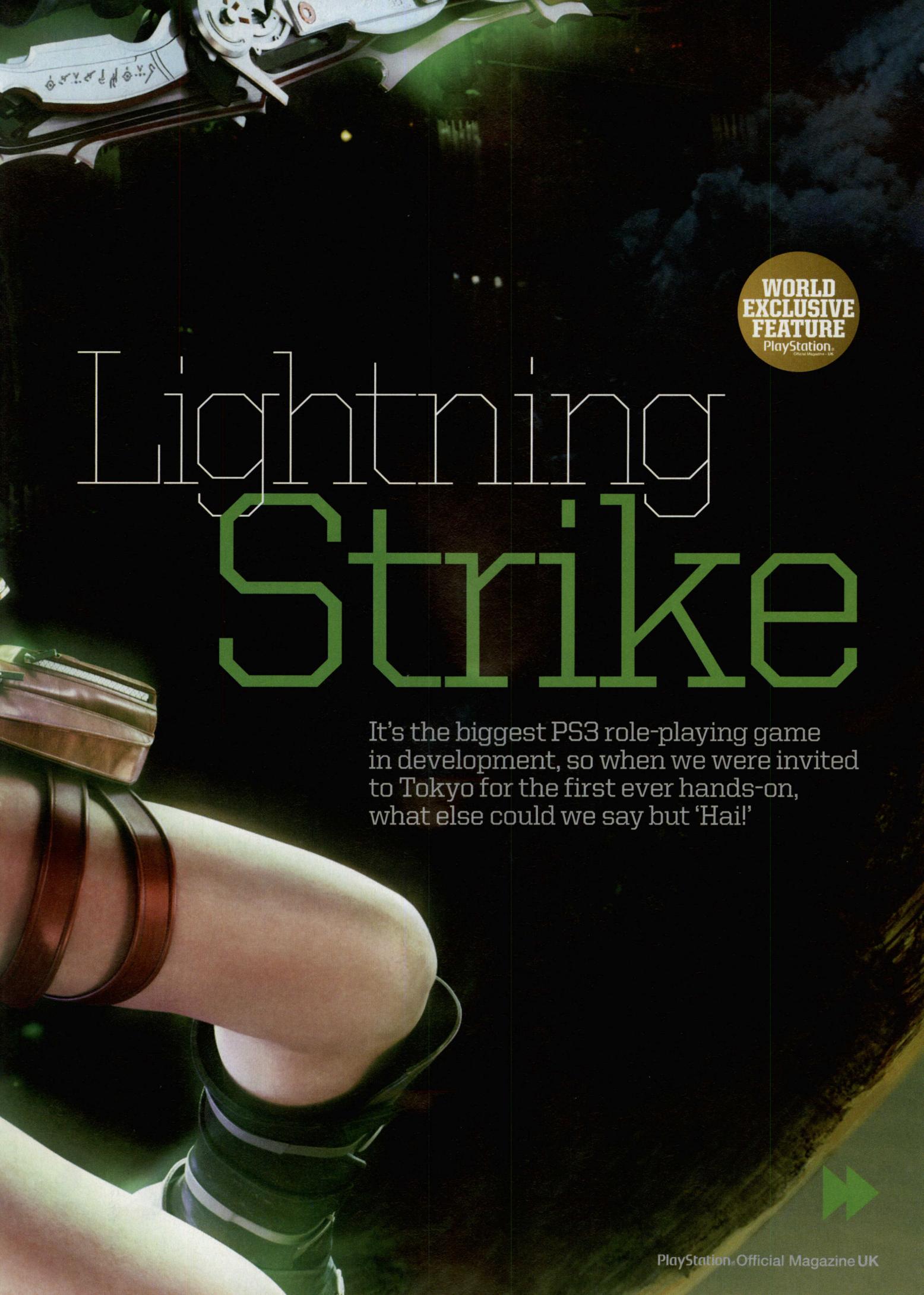
Warning: The only doctor who would advise us on the health risks involved in playing games for 24 hours warned that it was potentially very hazardous. There was talk of physical and mental consequences – RSI, eye strain, sleep deprivation, psychological problems, and even death. So do not try to recreate this 'experiment' at home. Ever. We won't be doing it again. Probably.

feature

Final Fantasy XIII

082





WORLD
EXCLUSIVE
FEATURE

PlayStation.

Official Magazine - UK

Lightning Strike

It's the biggest PS3 role-playing game in development, so when we were invited to Tokyo for the first ever hands-on, what else could we say but 'Hai!'





▼ Visually *FFXIII* raises the bar way beyond any RPG that's gone before – check out the lighting, shadows, expressions and hair.



Two years, ten months, four days, two hours and 23 minutes. That's how long has passed since we – or rather, our predecessor magazine – first saw video footage of *Final Fantasy XIII* at a pre-E3 event in May 2006. And now, at long last, we're at Square Enix HQ in the buzzing Shinjuku ward of Tokyo to finally get our hands on the most anticipated RPG ever made. For the record, we're doing it before any other PlayStation magazine. Oh, and we're also in the company of director Motomu Toriyama, producer Yoshinori Kitase, and art director Isamu Kamikokuryo. The temptation to stay here forever, or at least until our 90-day limit set by the immigration office has expired, is frankly overwhelming.

The game kicks off with the crazy pretty trailer you've seen countless times: the one with the future sex angel killing fascists on a speedy train, then having to fight a giant robotic shark with a scorpion's tail and chainsaw arms, in a green-and-black underworld that looks like Doctor Who as reimagined by the Wachowskis. The chick is Lightning, and she's accompanied initially by a black, afro-sporting Shaft rip-off named Sazh Katzroy. "He's the comic relief character," confirms Kitase. "And in certain points you

Team Nora Introducing the members of Snow's Gang



1

Lebreau

Super pretty orphan who grew up with Snow. "Hey, my eyes are up here, guy."

2

Gadot

Gun-happy old pal of Snow's, doing his thing for gingers everywhere.

4

Maqui

Goggle-wearing he-she who looks ready to hit the slopes. War? Not so much.

3

fal'Cie prisoner

Gives Snow advice before Nora heads into battle. ID revealed later, we think.

also see he's very caring about his family. I feel like I should learn from him!" What you won't know yet is just how you fight the shark-scorpion-robo-thing using the new active battle system. And we're about to tell you.

But before we get punchy, let's get up to speed with the plot. *Final Fantasy XIII* centres on a cult-like race called the fal'Cie who were told by a mythical Crystal 13 centuries ago to create a paradise for humanity. This paradise is called Cocoon and exists high above the real world of Pulse. But now Pulse is essentially a massive wasteland filled with outcasts who've been expelled from Cocoon. It's here, among the poor and the ostracized, that Lightning finds herself at the game's outset, and her soul-piercing, greenish-blue,

dive-in-NOW eyes tell us she's not just going to sit around begging for spare change.

Do the robot

Our new shark-scorpion robo-friend is the first step in doing something about her plight, although it's only here to roll over and die in the process of us learning the new combat system. This borrows from *FFXII* in that battles take place in real time (with characters operating on a timer), but you can now input three commands at once. Let's say you choose to attack with one of Lightning's techniques: four different move options appear, alongside the attack points required to use each. (One for Fight, Fire, or Lift; three for Fira.) These numbers correspond to a

Chronology

Final Fantasy VII (1997, PS1)

The first game in the series to feature on a Sony console, *Final Fantasy VII* also pioneered the combining of 3D characters with 2D backgrounds. Genuinely groundbreaking, fan-wowing graphics helped establish the series in the mainstream for the first time, bringing the RPG to a worldwide audience.

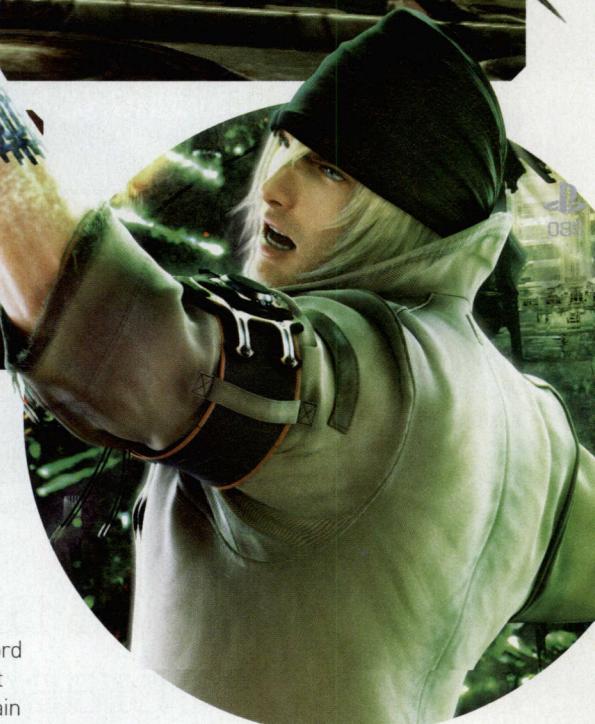


Final Fantasy VIII (1999, PS1)

Dropping the super-deformed anime looks of the previous games, *Final Fantasy VIII* opted instead for a realistic aesthetic. Squall and his band of high-school warriors stand tall and proud in their 3D clothing. An enormous financial success, it earned Square Enix over \$50 million in just 13 weeks.



Alien at first, the triple-command battle system quickly feels natural.



The opening scenes see Lightning and Sazh save a band of prisoners from a train using cunning, magic, and bullets.

"It's down to you to learn what magic works best."

timer bar made up of three segments, each equivalent to one attack point. So you can choose to chain a trio of one-point attacks – Lift, Fight, Fight – for instance – or spunk the lot on a single Fira attack.

Lift is a new command that launches foes into the air and often leads to spectacular deaths. It's clearly inspired by the beautifully choreographed, gravity defying battles in the Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children movie. So when we later use Fire, Lift, Fight against one of the grey Stormtrooper-like soldiers first seen in the trailer, Lightning hits him with a

bolt of flame, thrusts him into the air, then leaps up to finish him off with a single sword swing. Each battle ends with a screen that shows how long it lasted, your longest chain of attacks, the number of breaks amassed, and an overall star rating (out of five) for your performance, which the team says will affect gameplay, but annoyingly won't elaborate on.

Some enemies, such as our robofriend, can't be lifted. Using the command still takes off a small amount of HP, but it's down to you to learn which techniques and magics work best against particular enemies as you

Cocksure and vain, Snow's the sort of bloke we'd usually like to spark out. Thankfully, he's fun to play as.

play. In that sense, this is a very conventional RPG. One thing to note, however, is that at no stage are we able to control Sazh, or even issue a gambit to instruct him what to do. (He automatically unleashes rounds of gunfire upon enemies, and heals

Final Fantasy IX (2001, PS1)

The ninth game in the series saw a return to the knights, castles and princesses of the very earliest Final Fantasy titles. Featuring more light-hearted scenarios and a beautiful, whimsical soundtrack from composer Nobuo Uematsu, it's one of the best loved games in the series by conservative fans.



Final Fantasy X (2002, PS2)

Final Fantasy's debut on PlayStation 2 saw the series shift from pre-rendered backdrops to fully 3D vistas. For the first time the previously silent characters spoke through their voice actors and technological advances allowed the world map to be ditched – a move some long-term fans still consider controversial.



feature

Final Fantasy XIII



Team Nora prepares to go into battle. From left to right: Lebreau, Snow, Gadot.



Lightning whenever she loses health.) Kitase won't say how we'll be able to control other characters in battle but he does admit, "As far as carrying over the system that was in FFXII, that's definitely not going to be the case. We're creating an all-new growth and combat system that's suited to XIII."

Strength in numbers

The team is keen to point out that despite the initial focus on our ladyfriend, FFXIII is

"Snow carries himself with an almost brash swagger."

about an ensemble cast rather than a single protagonist. "Unlike other FF titles the story is told from different viewpoints and characters, not just Lightning," explains Toriyama. This much is evident when, after polishing off the opening mech and spending 20 minutes slaying more grey Stormtrooper types while exploring the linear (to aid newbies)



▀ Battles can be spectacular – but thinking about your next turn means there's no time to sit back and savour them.

landscape as Lightning, another CG movie introduces a second band of finely sculpted, regime-fighting upstarts.

It's here that we meet Snow Villiers for the first time. This bandana-wearing skater boy is all flowing peroxide hair and my-first-shave stubble, and it's no surprise to learn that he heads up a group that's resisting

Cocoon rule, called Team Nora. Watching the video which introduces Snow and pals is truly astonishing because even though it's all in Japanese, you can tell exactly what's going on from characters' body language and facial reactions. Snow carries himself with a confident, almost brash swagger; his cohorts follow his lead with a mixture of subdued fear and plucky determination; a child who is handed a very real gun slowly examines her new toy in enthralled yet silent awe. And the voice synching is perfect too; the characters look like they're speaking every word for real.

The next half hour is similar to the time spent handling Lightning – we take control ➤

Continued over

Final Fantasy X-2 (2004, PS2)

This, the first PlayStation 2 spin-off from the main Final Fantasy series, has a bubbly J-Pop sort of feel that's certainly not for everyone. The bright, colourful graphics extend the lighter side of Final Fantasy X, and the trio of female lead characters ensure that X-2 is a significant departure from the Final Fantasy norm.



Final Fantasy XI (2004 - US PS2)

The decision to release the 11th game in the series as an MMORPG was met with widespread resistance from fans, but by January 2004 over a million characters were played in the game regularly – making it the best-subscribed of all charging MMORPGs at the time. Sadly, however, it was never released on PS2 in Europe.



The cast

FFXIII's tidy-looking rebel alliance

It's been ages since we considered it acceptable to openly fancy a game character – 18 years, to be precise, when our love affair with Streets Of Rage's Blaze ended acrimoniously. But between FFXIII's Lightning and Vanille we're struggling to stick to our self-imposed ban on gaming crushes. Here's the info on the girls (and, for the sake of balance, the boys).

Vanille

Pig-tailed hippy who manages to stay cheery despite living on the clapped-out world of Pulse – outwardly anyway. We're told that she "carries a heavy burden in her heart". Definitely sounds like our kind of girl then.



Lightning

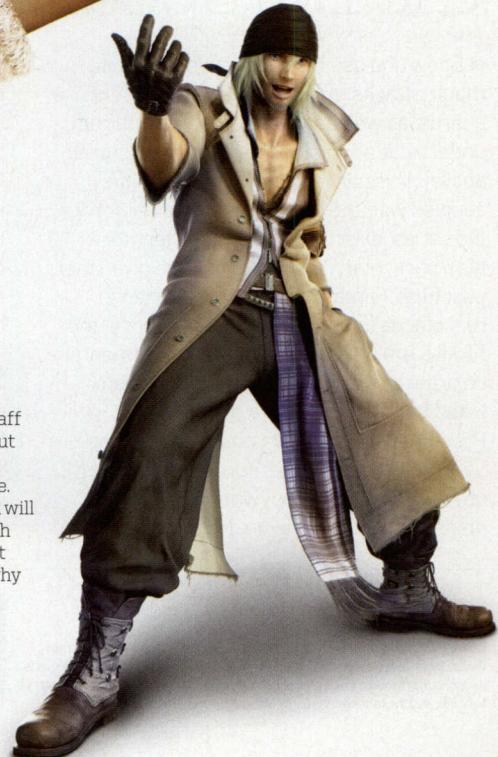
Described by designer Tetsuya Nomura as "a female version of Cloud Strife from FFVII". She's a former Cocoon soldier who can manipulate gravity using a device attached to her thumb. She's 5'10" tall. So yes, tall enough to kiss you. Or, more likely, knee you in the nuts.



Sazh

Sazh

Former army colleague of Lightning who initially seems to have doubts about her plan but helps out anyway. Wields dual pistols and carries a baby chocobo inside his massive 'fro. Is easily moved to tears. Not now, man!



Snow

The Square Enix staff call him Mr 33cm but – *thank God* – insist it's just his shoe size. Uses ice magic, and will end up teaming with Lightning to protect Vanille – how and why remains to be seen.

feature

Final Fantasy XIII

1 The numbers game

The four commands here are Fight, Fire, Lift and Fira. Note that Fira has a number three by it, meaning it utilises all three attack points for one particular turn.

2 Enter the triangle

Once you're happy with the trio of commands you've entered, simply press \triangle to action them. However, if you're hit during the first attack the other two are auto-cancelled.

3 Ready for sleep

Enemies glow gold when they're close to death – at which point spectacular finishing attacks come into play, depending on the status of your bonus bar. (See point five.)

4 Tasty health bar

While FF XIII features a host of innovations, the traditional health bar, showing HP for your current character and all party members, remains intact.

5 Play the percentages

Complete chains of attacks to fill this bonus meter and send your opponent into Break mode – a weakened state in which your attacks become much more powerful.

6 Cool for Katz

While Sazh can't be controlled in the opening stages, his powerful distance attack – a relentless stream of gunfire – and ability to continually cure Lightning both come in handy.



"We're actively working on the European version."

of Snow and use his gun moves and white magic attacks to pick off the omnipresent grey guards, as well as metallic wolves with red underbellies and glowing blue feet (pictured above). This particular character design, coupled with the futuristic setting, reinforces the series' direct move into sci-fi territory. It's a particularly intriguing change given that past Final Fantasies have often looked to real places for inspiration – for instance, the FFXII team based many of its environments on areas in the Mediterranean, and even listed India and New York as influences. Presumably that wasn't possible this time?

"FFXIII is based in a futuristic setting so obviously there isn't anywhere we can just drive to to give us an example of how it should

look," explains Kamikokuryo. "So we take existing cities [as inspiration] and then build upon them with things that we imagine to be futuristic. Pulse is supposed to be an immense wilderness. I got the inspiration for it by going on a cross country tour of the USA from Washington to San Francisco, visiting all of the major national parks. Yellowstone was the most inspiring place, and Route 66 too – that was very cool."

Snowy finale

OPM's hands-on ends with another boss battle, and this one has an even more startlingly absurd design than the robo-villain we encountered at the outset. It's a huge mech that walks on all fours and has what



Lightning spends much of her time looking pensive and serious. Cheer up, might never... Hey, that hurt!"

can only be described as a massive duck's beak. There's no time for laughter, though – within moments it has us trapped in a corner, unable to move as it pounds on Snow's head with its front left foot. We're unable to get any attacks

Final Fantasy XII (2007, PS2)

Despite wildly dividing the fanbase with its innovative new battle system that's closer to an MMO than a traditional RPG, the 12th game in the series is its most unorthodox. The ensemble cast chase a story that grips from start to finish, and the fantastic visuals still hold up well – even in the PS3 era.



Final Fantasy Tactics (2008, PSP)

Originally released on PS1 in 1997, Final Fantasy Tactics is widely (and correctly) regarded as the best spin-off game from the main series. As one of the finest strategy RPGs ever created, the gameplay is a mixture of RPG and chess. Cloud, Aeris and Chocobos all feature in the storyline. We scored it 10/10 in issue 11 – one of only two perfect PSP scores.





▲ An early cut-scene shows Team Nora conversing with some fal'Cie prisoners. "Yes, OF COURSE they're going to like us..."



▲ Lebreau and Gadot chip in to help Snow out, but like Sazh there's no way of controlling them in the opening stages.

off at all but then, just when it looks like it's all over, we realise that the three-command attacks are optional – to trigger a quicker blow you can just input one command then hit ④. This stuns our giant opponent and knocks him backwards, enabling us to slip back into the three-command routine. The battle finally ends with a blizzard attack that turns the entire mech to ice before it keels over and disappears. Bam!

Questions ahead

It's been an exhilarating 60 minutes, but the one disappointment is that there's been no insight whatsoever into the levelling-up system, or means of expanding your party [Kitase: "Generally there's going to be three members in your party, but as far as anything further, you'll have to wait and see"]. Both elements will inevitably play a huge part in the final game, but the team won't be drawn into commenting on them, nor what kind of map system we can expect. However, they do admit that us Europeans have had it bad in the past when it's come to waiting for an English-

language version, and insist the wait will be far less drawn out this time around.

"With all our titles – not just specifically for Final Fantasy XIII – we are speaking to the localisation team a lot earlier in the development process," explains Kitase. "This means we can get their opinions and feedback so that there isn't a major issue in localisation. Previously we would finish the Japanese version, then move onto the US version, and then Europe – but now it's all simultaneously moving. We're actively working on those versions. That should eliminate a lot of the time lag on the releases, but obviously this depends on when the Japanese version of the game is finished. We aim to release it within six months of the Japanese version."

With that Japanese version not due until late 2009, a European release is still over a year away. But having finally got our hands on it after nearly three years of salivating over the footage, we can finally say that Final Fantasy XIII is very real, and shaping up to be very good. The future can't come fast enough.

Meet the makers

FFXIII genii talk to OPM



Isamu Kamikokuryo,
Art director

"Lightning is my favourite character in Final Fantasy XIII. I've had to create posters and other promotional materials, and visually she's just a very stunning character to work with. So I just really enjoy creating art for her."



Motomu Toriyama,
Director

"While the storyline and the setting are completely new, there are features that reoccur throughout the series which will appeal to the traditionalists, like Chocobos and summonings and monsters. And although the active battle system is still implemented, there's going to be a completely different feel [to FFXII] when you play this game."



Yoshinori Kitase,
Producer

On the oft-rumoured Final Fantasy VII remake: "It's a game I've lived with for over ten years, and my emotional ties to it are very strong. So if it were to happen then obviously there would be a lot of thought and work put into it."

The OPM review setup



Our review code is tested on hi-def and standard-def TVs to ensure we know how games perform at both ends of the scale. Our HD setup is a 70" Sony Bravia with Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound.

PlayStation®
Official Magazine - UK

Reviews

Your essential guide to every new release

This month's reviews offer an object lesson in why owning a PS3 is amazing. Not only is there no region locking – you can play games from all over the world – but occasionally a game will emerge from one of the other big territories that's unexpectedly brilliant. This month there are two – Sega's gangster saga Yakuza 3, and Sony's baseball triumph MLB 09: The Show.

They're not the easiest to pick up and play – you'll need at least phrasebook Japanese for Yakuza 3, and a working knowledge of baseball to play MLB (it's a tossup which is the most daunting). But the pay-off is extraordinary – take note EA, 2K and Konami: *this* is how you make a sports game.

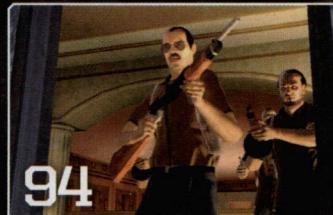
There's plenty of home front action too. Scrappy, LBP-flavoured party game Rag Doll Kung Fu is the latest reason to get involved with PSN, Command & Conquer (featuring, weirdly, Gemma Atkinson) is way better than expected, and Watchmen: The End Is Nigh isn't. Next month: three big fat exclusives.



92

YAKUZA 3

Does 'managing a hostess' make you a pimp? Even if there's a no-touching rule? Explore these and other cross-cultural questions in Sega's Japanese mob sequel.



94

THE GODFATHER II

Mixes the street-level soldiering of the first game with surprisingly deep strategy, to crackers results. But is it more than just a Marinara-flavoured GTA knockoff?



106

MLB 09: THE SHOW

Brilliantly playable, and full of touches that put other sports games to shame. Find out exactly why, if you only import one game, it should definitely be this.

How we score our reviews...

10 Essential

Instant classic that's as close as it gets to PlayStation perfection.

9 Outstanding

Highly recommended, and an investment you won't regret.

8 Very good

Mostly excellent, but held back by one or two minor flaws.

7 Good

Enjoyable, but with definite room for improvement. Rent it first.

6 Reasonable

A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places.

5 Average

A game that is both fun and frustrating in equal measure.

4 Below average

Too flawed to be anything more than a brief curiosity.

3 Poor

A seriously flawed game with no long-term appeal.

2 Awful

A disgrace to the bargain bin.

Avoid it as you would a bullet.

1 Horrific

Buy this shocker and watch your console self-combust in protest.



Our highest accolade

The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near-flawless gameplay, great graphics and profound appeal.

Y3 is visually striking, but hard to understand if you no speak the lingo.



Tokyo tales



Yakuza 3

Far Eastern promises

Well that was never going to last. At the end of *Yakuza 2* handsome antihero Kazuma Kiryu renounced the world of organised crime and shacked up in Okinawa to look after a bunch of orphans. Orphans! But everybody knows gangsters never *really* retire, and within minutes of *Ryu ga Gotoku 3* (as it's known in Japan) he's drawn back into the pleasingly stylised violence of Tokyo's murky underworld.

We're not talking about the kind of amoral, sandbox-style city used as the backdrop for most western crime sims, though. *Yakuza 3* takes a traditional Japanese RPG design and applies it to a contemporary setting, demonstrating the gulf in taste between Japanese and western gamers in the process: there's more watching cut-scenes and scrolling through dialogue boxes here than there is stealing cars. But approach the game with an open mind and you'll be delighted by the scale and variety of its ambition, and its occasional utter craziness. In-between all the dialogue, you explore



the painstakingly recreated streets of Tokyo and Okinawa, interacting with NPCs and fighting random battles with various street hoodlums. Fights are less complicated than in a fully-fledged beat-'em-up, but also more varied, featuring golf clubs, shotguns, nunchucks and head-stomping, nose-crunching moves.

Kit off

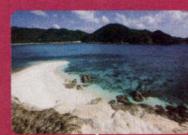
Nevertheless, in spite of all the violence (and an abundance of macho posturing that sees men taking their tops off at the slightest opportunity) there's another crucial difference between *Yakuza 3* and its western counterparts. Whereas, say, Rockstar's brand of violence is full of

moral ambiguity, Sega's vision of the criminal fraternity is an altogether more morally upright one. It might borrow from *Yakuza* movies like *Sonatine* or *Boiling Point*, but the morality here is much more cut and dried. Indeed Kiryu spends the first several hours tending to the domestic problems of his orphanage. The contrast with this domestic triviality makes it all the more creepy when the narrative wrenches you back to a Tokyo crime boss chopping up animal carcasses – but it also leaves you in no doubt as to who the good guy is. Looking after orphans and old ladies, finding missing dogs, helping tourists carry ice-creams, dealing with the school bully:



Influences

Component parts of *Yakuza*'s gang culture



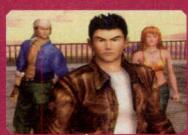
Okinawa



Beat Takeshi



GTA



Shenmue



Booze

Girls
As well as wooing attractive girls with the art of conversation, you also manage your own hostess [known as kabukura in Japan].

Sports
Okay, so the putting is a little off, but the golf and billiards games are on a par with many dedicated sports sims.

Noodles
As well as being able to eat ramen noodles in the game you can now eat them in real life, thanks to Yakuza-branded foodstuffs!

LOVING

Running

Kiryu turns like an oil tanker when he runs, so the new chase sequences are irritating. Luckily they don't appear too often.

HATING

Running

▼

This is how you spend the first part of the game. At one point Kiryu even has a meeting with the PTA representative.

Turning Japanese

Kiryu's world teems with life – the level of incidental detail is staggering, from the Boss coffee ads to the Okinawan sanshin music that comes and goes on the breeze as you pass restaurants or shops. When you finally reach Tokyo, Shinjuku's red light district is brought to life more realistically than the first two games. And when you're not following the main story, there's so much to do! Playing darts might feel like controlling a drunkard but who cares when there's an entire golf game in here. There are billiard games that would put many specialised snooker titles to shame. There's mahjong, gambling, baseball and fishing. There are dating games – you can even choose to manage your own hostess girl, dressing her up and training her in the art of conversation to attract clients.

▼ You can't beat up pedestrians like in GTA, but the action is still pretty brutal.

▼ In what is an unlikely twist for a game about violent thugs, you spend a lot of the game looking after kids.

▼ Non-natives will struggle with some of the Japanese references. And the karaoke.

▼ The game kicks off with a double murder, sparking a complicated whodunnit mystery.

With such an abundance of content, it's perhaps no surprise that the quality veers all over the place, from sublime brilliance to simple-minded idiocy and back again, with detours via the bizarre. But that sums up why Yakuza 3 is so entertaining: this is no cookie-cutter game that's

The narrative is similarly schizophrenic. From a western perspective, it feels a little bit too preachy. But while it feels saccharine and occasionally patronising, it also covers fairly mature themes like racism and Japanese domestic politics. The thing is,

“Fights are full of nunchucks, golf clubs, and nose-crunching moves.”

dropped off the end of an assembly line; it has spilled out of the mind behind Super Monkey Ball and Shenmue. It's a game that is bursting with as much ingenuity as it is eccentricity. The new chase/pursuit battles, for example, are terrible – holding down a button to sprint then wrestling the controls to dodge obstacles. But it's easy to forget this while you're taking part in an actual honest-to-goodness game of hide 'n' seek with some kids (which, in a game about the convoluted politics and treachery of nefarious crime gangs, feels pretty bonkers). Or there's the way you unlock new combos, by taking photos of civilians and blogging about them.

those domestic politics might not be quite so interesting if you're not Japanese, which is perhaps one reason why there's no news – yet – of a western release. On the one hand, that means that they won't butcher the game by imposing a terrible dub on it like they did with the first Yakuza. On the other hand, it means you'll need to learn Japanese if you want to play it.

If Sega doesn't release this in the west, however, it would be more criminal than anything the real Yakuza has ever done. Well, maybe. Because, for all its minor flaws and occasional craziness, Yakuza 3 is an amazing game.

David McCarthy

PlayStation. Official Magazine UK

✓ The cars have been sexed up but they still drive like bricks on grease.



Risky business



The Godfather II

Just when I think I'm out...

The Godfather II game doesn't use that much from the movie. Hell, it doesn't even use all the words from the title. ('Part' presumably sounding too fancy.) But the basic setup – the bit you probably didn't pay much attention to in the film – is at least similar. Jewish syndicate boss Hyman Roth has tried to unite the Five Families, and a pact with Cuba's president looks set to make them all rich enough to stop fighting. Sadly, Fidel Castro then sticks his revolutionary oar in, and everyone scuttles back to America.

Then it's onto a bizarre Guy Ritchie-esque opening sequence that soon lets you know that all similarities with the Francis Ford Coppola movies have



abruptly ended. It's a wise decision – aping genius is always going to make you look a bit shoddy and, by contrast, you can hardly fail to look better than Ritchie.

Going straight

The first Godfather game was decidedly mediocre. In gameplay terms, it retraced the same ground that makes lazy comparisons to Grand Theft Auto so irresistible. Drive around, steal a car, get out of your car to shoot people, then smash a few shop windows to convince people they need to give you money. That basic mechanic is still intact, but the world around it has become decidedly deeper, and more... game-like.

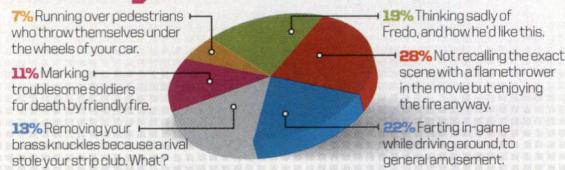
So now, instead of competing to build an empire against bosses who can't fight back, your own rackets will come under fire from enemy Dons. If you own all the parts of a crime ring, you win a bonus – be it brass knuckles, armoured cars, or bulletproof vests. Influential people can be courted, too. If you get the Union Boss into your pocket, you win a speed bonus on the rebuilding of your properties.

There's more Monopoly and Risk in The Godfather II than there is GTA, and it's all the more fun for it.

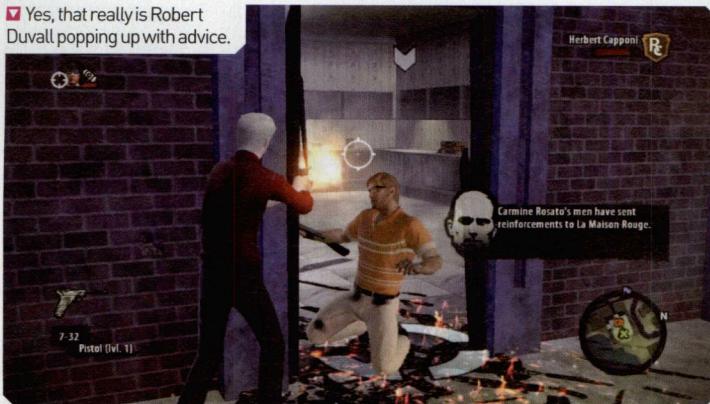
As you make your way through the long tutorial levels, you get more space in your family to recruit new made men – goons, essentially, who can join your entourage, or be despatched to other locations to take them over. Distributing your men across various points of conflict means there's a strategy element, but if it looks like they're losing – or you get bored of shuffling resources rather than shooting – you can always drive over and personally tip the balance in your favour.

Strangely, if your made men are 'killed' in combat they're revived shortly afterwards, and the same goes for your enemies' mobsters, too. Unless you find out their special kill condition, that is, which could be anything from being rammed with a car, to being pushed into the river or choked to death. There are enough ways to kill a man to make guessing tedious, so you're able to find out their special kill by doing favours for people dotted around the city.

What you do in... TG II



Yes, that really is Robert Duvall popping up with advice.



The Don's Eye View map, so called because all Mafia Dons live in a blimp in the sky.

None of this gets overwhelmingly complicated, though, and there's enough going on to make it playing genuinely engaging and rewarding. Going online adds further depth, giving your made men performance-boosting experience (you can buy them upgrades offline, but they hit a glass ceiling without an online XP boost). One slight shame is that currently the game's more strategic elements don't carry over into the multiplayer, which is more about deathmatches, setting fires and cracking safes. But EA has announced a free DLC pack to launch alongside the game, which should fix this – check next month's online column to see how it plays.

A friend of ours

There are other problems, though. The graphics don't make anywhere near full use of the system, and bizarre mission requests will ask you, for no good reason, to smash up your own properties. AI glitches can lead to your crew members running around the outside of your car like a boobless



Unless you kill rival made men a certain way, they come back to life, which is odd.

Benny Hill chase, and there doesn't appear to be a strong logic to which doors you can bomb open, and which are impregnable until you've taken an entire building over.

But you'll learn the game's foibles, and tolerate them because it is at least doing something interesting. The Godfather II is a likeable, albeit unpolished, blend of action and strategy that hasn't been done before. Clearly, thought has been put into making the world feel deeper and more engaging than it was in the first game, and even if the result is a massive detour from the hallowed source material, at least it's not the blindly faithful mess-up it might have been.

Jon Blyth



BluMovies

HD films to feed your next-gen disc player



A History Of Violence

Director David Cronenberg Starring Viggo Mortensen, Maria Bello ETA Out now

Instead of tentacles and wrong-sex, bio-horror vet Cronenberg gives us a sedate Midwest town and a happy father of a cosy family. A father who might also be an ex-mob killer. Stern stairway sex and a splintering marriage then divert the film into typically odd dramatic spaces.

W

Director Oliver Stone Starring Josh Brolin, Elizabeth Banks ETA Out now

Even on Blu-ray, Stone's Bush biopic feels like too soon. Inevitably, given the tragicomedy of his tenure as US prez, the tone lurches all over the shop as Dubya gets drunk, finds God and declares war. A remarkable performance from Josh Brolin just about holds the shambles together.



The Bourne Trilogy

Director Doug Liman, Paul Greengrass Starring Matt Damon, Franka Potente ETA Out now

All three Bourne are finally available on Blu-ray. Which means punch-ups, chase sequences and the naughty old CIA acting up again. The second film goes a bit too far with the wobbly hand-held cameras, but otherwise this is impeccable action from start to finish.



Movie of the month

Transporter 3

Director Olivier Megaton Starring Jason Statham, Natalie Portman ETA 20 April

Return to brilliantly idiotic form for the Transporter series. Jason Statham growls in an interchangeable cockney/dreadful American accent while kicking Euro-goons all over the screen and driving his car really fast. The plot's wispy like a cloud's knickers, but all you need to know is the action rocks and there's also a pretty lady in it.



Chop sacky

Rag Doll Kung Fu Fists Of Plastic

Like LittleBigPlanet's nutter cousin

You know when you're playing LittleBigPlanet and instead of competing for points or helping each other up obstacles you and your mates stop and just slap each others' sackboys all over the screen? That's what playing Rag Doll Kung Fu is like, only the sackboys are ninja-shaped, have access to weapons and can throw lightning balls at each other. And basically it's brilliant.

The original PC version of Rag Doll was made by LBP co-creator Mark Healey, and the feel of your fighter is a lot like sackboy, with the same lolling gait and floaty jumps. The controls are similar too. As well as pressing **△** to jump or **□** to grab items and walls, Rag Doll uses the virtual puppet controls found in LBP, so if you hold **△** or **□** you can use the analogue sticks to control each arm independently. The fighty bits are where



it gets a bit different – **Ⓐ** kicks, **Ⓑ** punches and throws and **Ⓒ** blocks – but the messy, swaying moves themselves feel totally consistent with the 'set it off and let it happen' physics of LBP.

Puppet master

And that feel is key to Rag Doll's fun. At its best, with four players leaping about, tossing crates, scrambling for power-ups and hammering out three-button combos, it's thrillingly, frustratingly chaotic. Playing perfectly into that is how the game gets you physically involved, with the best use of motion control since, well, LBP. The key is in the simplicity – you make a lightning ball with a shake of the pad before tossing it with **Ⓐ**, pull off a Firefly superpunch by holding punch and wrenching the Sixaxis right or left, and hold the pad itself upside-down, zen-like, to restore health by meditating.

On top of that are weapons (staffs, nunchucks, throwing stars) and power-ups (noodles that give you back your health, and idols that boost the Chi energy needed for special moves) to scramble



Crowding the basket in Capture The Fish is an unacceptably cheap way of scoring points.



Grab level parts – like this pendulum, or a windmill – to escape danger. Or just to swing.



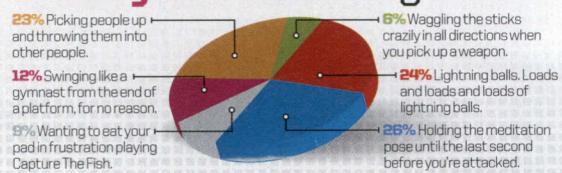
You get to create custom fighters from the body parts of the existing ones.

for. There are different game types, too, which make things even more deranged. In Dodgeball you can only cause damage by heaving the ball at other players, while King Of The Hill is a messy battle to own a platform for as long as possible, and Capture The Fish has players snatching a flopping carp and tossing it into a basket to score points, before they're battered by the other three players.

The end result is like a super-violent, Eastern-themed Punch & Judy show. The only drawback is that it's almost certainly too scatterbrained for serious fight fans. It thrives on the carnage of multiplayer. It wants every game to be full, and to that end it allows four players on a single PS3, and you can draft in support from online friends. The joy is in the free-for-all abandon, rather than the skilful cut and thrust. There are tactics – guarding the basket and stealing points in Capture The Fish, say – but the confrontations are messy. Still, if you're after an accessible and, crucially, fun scrapper, this is the best on PS3.

Nathan Ditum

What you do in... Rag Doll



PlayStation®
Official Magazine - UK

8

■ The Soviet technology is all about giant war machines and Tesla coils.



■ You'll divide your time between staring at tiny tanks and the giant bosoms of B-list actresses.



■ Stock up on sardines and rubber suits, any minute now they'll send in the electric dolphins.



Camp commander

Command & Conquer Red Alert 3

So long, and thanks for the mammarys

Info

Format PS3 ETA Out now Pub EA Dev EA Los Angeles Players 1-8 Web commandandconquer.com It's like Setting up a war room in the Playboy mansion.

If real warfare featured half of the preposterous technology you get to play with in this little bundle of strategic joy, we'd watch the news more often. Hell, we'd even sign up for a life of buzzcuts and beasting. Because whereas most RTS games are painfully dry, Red Alert doesn't so much ignore the rulebook as burn it and feed it to the electric dolphin death squad.

The core mechanics haven't changed, so if you've ever played a Command & Conquer game before you can skip the thorough (if a little tortuous) tutorial and jump right in. The plot is all 'parallel universe, WW2 never happened' stuff, and whether you play as the Soviets, the Allies or the Empire you'll get objectives from your commander. Make a base, build some tanks, worry about ore supplies, blast the enemy back to atoms,

Castlist

Hammy



Tim Curry

From Rocky Horror to the game's Soviet Premier Anatoly Cherenko.

British



Gemma Atkinson

The Hollyoaks hottie plays the busty and oh-so-British Lieutenant Eva McKenna.

Brassy



Jenny McCarthy

Jim Carrey's other half struts her stuff as the sexy Special Agent Tanya.

all by moving a cursor across huge maps and pumping the **X** button. On console, the controller has always been the problem for the RTS genre, and even with the slick new radial menu mapped to **□** the Sixaxis struggles to match the precision of a mouse. It's fine for ordering whole battalions to their death, not so much for picking out one tiny red Cossack. A few misplaced soldiers aren't enough to seriously mess up any of the battles though, so you'll be able to muddle through happily enough.

Loose lips sink ships

What really makes Red Alert worth your attention is the mental selection of units at your command. The Empire have psychic school girls, the Soviets use armoured war bears with a deadly roar, and the allies like to send in electric dolphins to sink boats. And they're just the basics – build up your nuclear reactors, spend your credits on some battle labs and you might get to see giant

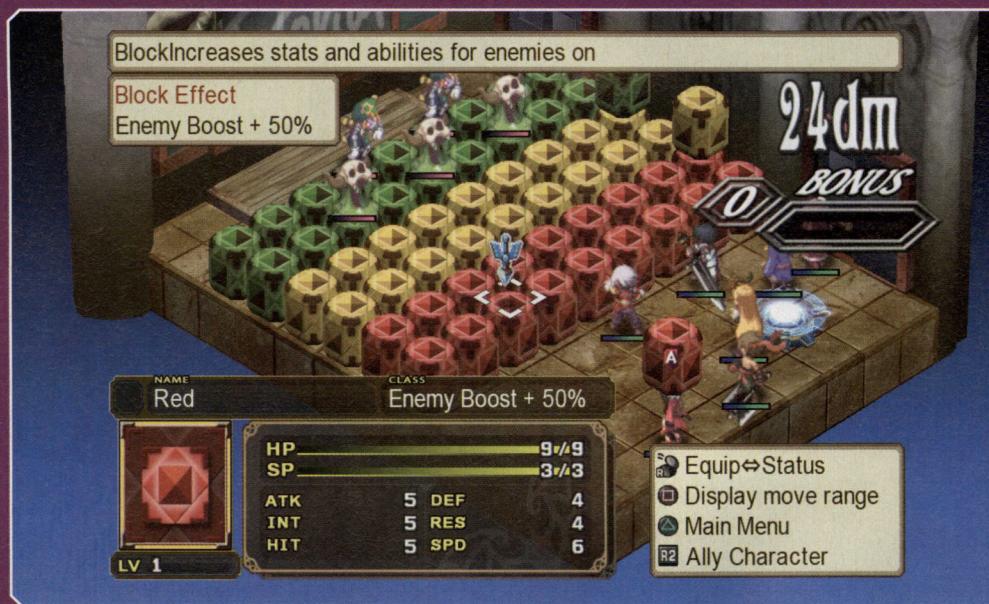
samurai transformer robots! The evil genius doesn't quite stretch to giving your units brains though, they'll always head from point A to B in a straight line, even if a wall of attack dogs, rocket launchers and Tesla coils stands in their way. Often you'll waste crucial time during a battle just holding your men's hands so they make it across the map unmolested.

But do you know what your enemy will try and distract you with? Breasts. Nary a minute will go by without some sexy, heavily-accented lady (Gemma Atkinson, Kelly Hu, Jenny McCarthy) appearing on a video screen in a uniform that definitely isn't standard military issue. And if that doesn't win you over, there's an actually recognisable Hollywood cast to do all the hammy video cut-scenes. It's a risky

marriage of in-depth, OCD strategising and total nonsense. Amazingly it works – particularly in online co-op. So, if you want to serve under a Soviet Tim Curry Premier [hey, who doesn't?] this is your chance. **Rachel Penny**

PlayStation®
Official Magazine - UK

8



Playground tactics

Disgaea 3 Absence Of Justice

What price your save data?

098



Info

Format: PS3/ETA Out now Pub: Square Enix Dev: Nippon Ichi Players: 1 Web: disgaea3game.com It's like A really long anime movie themed around maths porn.

How would you react if someone stepped on your console and destroyed four million hours of save data for your favourite videogame? Mao, a 1,578-year-old schoolboy demon is faced with this, admittedly unlikely, situation at the start of Disgaea 3. Calmly he vows to murder the clumsy-footed idiot: his own father, the king of the Netherworld. Within minutes you're thrust into a battle with your old man, who is so colossal that all you can see of him is his giant hand. Needless to say Mao doesn't fare too well, and is soon flicked away by an index finger. Suitably enraged, his quest begins – a journey that will draw numerous larger-than-life characters into Mao's life and maybe – just maybe – teach him a few valuable lessons along the way.

If you've never played a Disgaea game before then you're in for a treat. Not only is the series' inimitable brand of humour

Like this?

Play these



Disgaea
This PSP port of the original game features loads of extras – even a multiplayer mode.

VERDICT 8



Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions
More serious than Disgaea – it's all knights and chivalry – but Tactics is still incredible.

VERDICT 10

quite delicious, but the games that lurk beneath the witty one-liners are twisty and brilliantly compelling.

Chess, with guns

At its heart Disgaea 3 is a strategy RPG, a kind of videogame approximation of chess, if chess pieces could be levelled-up and kitted out with giant cock-off swords and guns. Battles take place in isometric environments that are divided into squares, just like a chessboard. You take turns with the computer AI to move your team around the 'board', taking swipes at enemy soldiers, mages and monsters, healing wounded units and linking up with teammates for ridiculous screen-shuddering attacks. On top of all this, there's an extra level of 3D strategising introduced by geo-blocks (an evolution of Disgaea 2's geo-panels). These are coloured cubes which alter battleground terrain and offer magical properties that can positively or negatively affect the characters standing on them. It sounds complicated, but it plays brilliantly.



▲ The actually funny dialogue tears strips off mad anime clichés and lesser RPG games.



▲ Anime flashes are triggered when nearby teammates gang up for flashy combo attacks.



▲ You can turn battle animations off, but then you'd miss enemies being hit with a big wet fish.

Post-battle you return to the Netherworld school where you and your teammates are pupils. Here you're free to spend any money you've earned from fighting on new equipment. Or you can heal your units at the school nurse, or even address the school council if you want to recruit a new character, or improve the quality (and price) of the items in the shop.

There's a wealth of hidden depth here, from the overhauled geo-block system to the After School Clubs and – strangest of all – item worlds. These are randomised areas that you access by literally entering your weapons and armour, fighting battles to level up the item in question. They offer a near-endless alternative to the game's linear chapter-by-chapter plot progression. But whether you want to simply sail through the story mode or get stuck into the statistical sandbox, Disgaea 3 is equally addictive, funny and rewarding. Currently, it's PS3's essential RPG, and even if turn-based fights and big hair aren't usually your thing, you should get involved. **Simon Parkin**

PlayStation®
Official Magazine - UK

9

SingStar Queen

Format PS3 ETA Out now Pub Sony

 Yes! I Want To Break Free is IN! Which means holding the mic too close to your face with one hand and doing a seductive vacuum cleaner mime with the other is also IN! There are 25 tracks in total, including belters like Bohemian Rhapsody, Don't Stop Me Now and The Show Must Go On. It's massive, basically – Queen's insanely singable pantomime rock is full of familiar tunes and big choruses, and there's never been a party which couldn't be improved by a



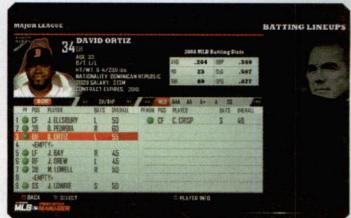
tearful, end-of-the-night singalong of We Are The Champions. At £25 it's the same per-track price as the SingStore, so unless you hate Queen (booo!) this is near essential. **Nathan Ditum**

PlayStation 8

MLB Front Office Manager

Format PS3 ETA US Import Pub Take Two

 Few sports management sims have succeeded on console, and this doesn't come close to bucking the trend. The menus are cumbersome like My First Website, making simple tasks like tracking a hot minor league prospect nigh-on impossible. Matches are enjoyable on a very shallow level, until you begin to curse the way in which good ideas haven't been followed through. For instance, you can tell your runner to try to steal a base, but not when to do so – stupid, because in real life



everyone knows it's best to steal when your batter is ahead in the count. With MLB 09: The Show (see p106) offering a bespoke Manager mode that's superior to this entire game, you've no need for FOM at all. **Ben Wilson**

PlayStation 4

Mytran Wars

Format PSP ETA 17 April Pub Deep Silver

 Mytran Wars' tactical grid-based missions have you taking down hostile aliens using a range of big stompy robot mechs. Just like more hardcore Japanese-developed games there's a temple-throbbing amount of customisation as you switch and mix the weapons and shields you've researched, using currency you've earned from defeating enemies. Fortunately, if you don't want to spend too long deciding which laser is hot right now, you can auto-assign



the lot and just get shooty. Comic-style cut-scenes and cel-shaded visuals give the game a neat, stylised look while the three multiplayer modes finish off this well polished and accessible PSP strategy game. **Kath Brice**

PlayStation 8

Japan Watch

This month's overseas action in a nutshell

Sacred Blaze

Format PS2 Pub Flight Plan Subtitles No

 I'm guessing that the news of PS3's launch has been a bit slow to filter down to the bottom feeder devs in Japan. It's the only way to explain this – a new PlayStation 2 role-player in which you play a god, forced off your cloud to lead a group of predictably unlikely heroes. The dilemma – do you snap it up now, or wait seven years for the PS3 twilight-years re-release? Decisions, decisions.



Kira: Rock 'n' Roll Show

Format PS2 Pub Princess Soft Subtitles No

This is more like what I was expecting from PS2 in 2009 – a remake of a niche (read: filthy) 2007 PC adventure about a group of clean-cut rock chicks. Still wavering? Then maybe the twin USPs of 'static images' and lots of dialogue will seal the deal.

099



Shinjuku no Ookami

Format PS2 Pub Spike Subtitles No

 With a density of 17,140 people per km², Tokyo's Shinjuku ward is one of the most heavily populated areas in the world. And in this cop-flavoured beat-'em-up you get to unleash baton-assisted justice on anyone who so much as looks at you cross-eyed. Consider it your fast track invitation to crippling RSI of the thumbs. Now then, where's everybody gone...?



Exotic Boxart Of The Month



Akugyou no Jiken File

Okay, he's either a dandy Edwardian private eye employed by a gang of circus prostitutes, or an emo pimp with bills to pay. Either way, we're in.



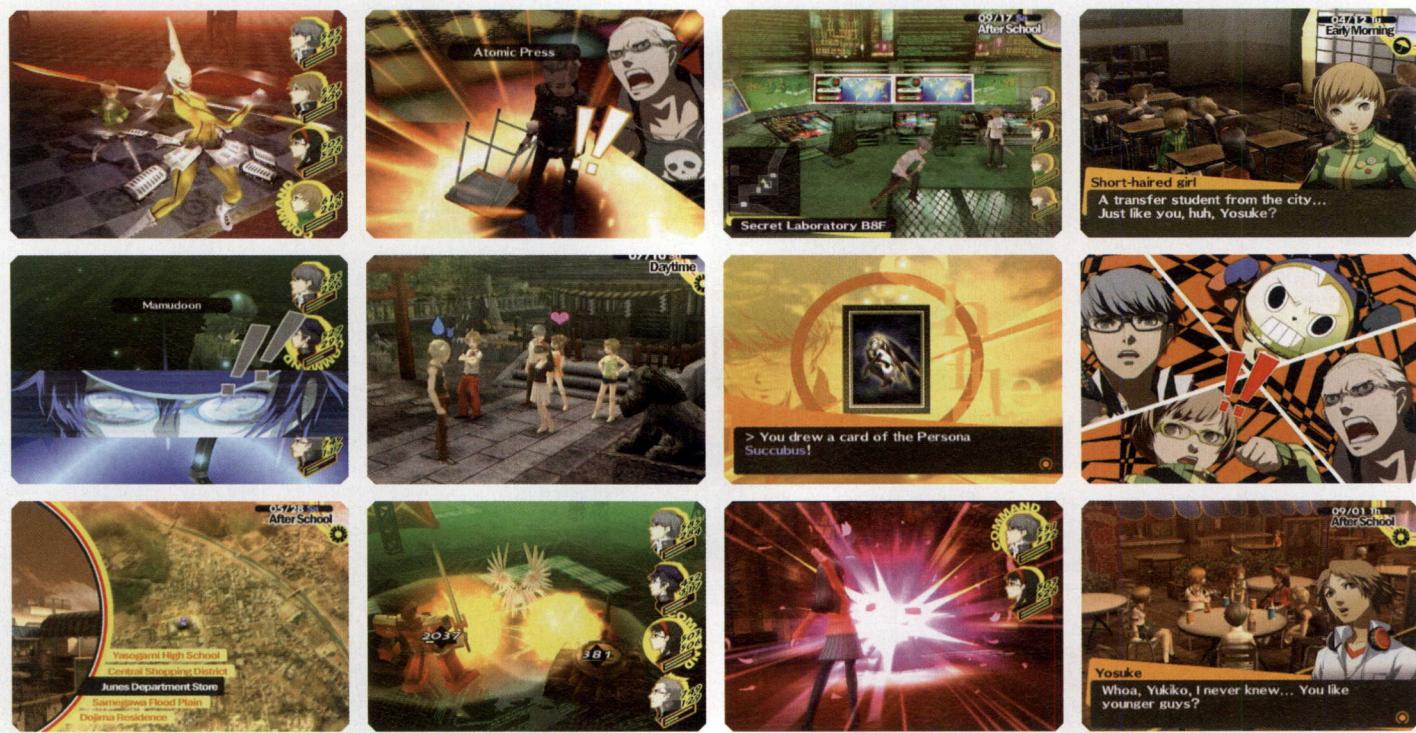
ADK Tamaishi Tamacy

This disturbing mish-mash boxart is the videogame equivalent of restaurants with photos of all their dishes in the menu. Keep on walking.



Tomoyo After: It's A Wonderful Life

It certainly doesn't look all that wonderful. In fact the 'life' that springs to mind is '30 years without parole'. Are they putting something in Japan's water?!



High-school magical

Persona 4

"I'll do my homework after I've solved the murder"

From the moment your character steps off the train and through the door of his uncle's house in the sleepy rural town of Inaba, it's clear that Persona 4 is going to be a difficult game to pigeonhole. Part detective thriller, part high-school soap opera, part hardcore dungeon-crawling JRPG, it's a game that draws from a wide range of influences and play styles to deliver a unique and varied experience. So much so that for the first couple of hours it's not really a videogame at all, but more of an extended interactive movie. These cut-scenes and dramatic interludes settle you into the daily routine of life in the countryside, introducing you to both your new high school, where you make friends and cause trouble, and your new home, where you hear about the murder case your uncle is working on.

Dead line

It's this crime drama that underpins the whole game. No sooner have you arrived at Inaba than a girl is found dead, entangled in the overhead phone lines that form a cat's cradle over the town. Soon enough other members of the community start to go missing, and their

Like this?

Play these



Persona 3
After-school adventure in which you must put an end to the 'Dark Hour' when the evil Shadow beasts roam the school grounds.

VERDICT 9



Canis Canem Edit
Rockstar's schoolboy GTA shares some similarities with Persona 4's educational gameplay, but bypasses the cod psychology.

VERDICT 8

corpses are found. And as it becomes increasingly clear that the police are making zero headway with the case, you and your friends start to investigate what's going on.

The game takes place in two key locations, Inaba and an esoteric twilight world, which is accessed by literally climbing into TV screens at an appointed hour. It's in this alternate dimension that the missing townsfolk can be found, held captive by their own psychological demons in a series of twisted dungeons. If that all seems a little leftfield, don't worry – when you're actually playing, it makes a weird sense. And while helping them overcome physical manifestations of their insecurities is, you know, *unusual*, it sure makes a welcome change from beating up ogres for coins. When you do free a hostage from their tormentor and return them safely to Inaba, the sense of accomplishment is huge, something that's helped no end by a witty, well-written script.

Back in the 'normal' world you spend your time attending school and, a bit like Rockstar's Canis

Info

Format PS2 **ETA** Out now **Pub**
Square Enix Dev Atlus Co **Players**
Web.atlus.com/persona4 It's like
Canis Canem Edit, only with more
counselling and magic televisions.

Canis Canem Edit, taking lessons to level-up your character's various attributes. There are loads of ways to do this (answering questions correctly in tests, for instance, or joining a school club) while the skills themselves – such as courage, strength and understanding – can improve your chances in battle, or open up new dialogue choices in conversation. The key thing is that the activities themselves, as well as the rewards gained from them, shape the story in tons of subtle ways.

Split personality

All of this is underpinned by a smart battle system which eases the complexity of juggling seven different types of attack and multiple 'personas' (think Final Fantasy's summons super-attacks), and ensures that the dungeon-crawling parts of the game are as compelling as the plot. With a story that you'll want to follow to its full conclusion Persona 4 offers north of 40 hours gameplay, and a creative, compelling experience that emerges as PS2's JRPG swansong.

Simon Parkin

PlayStation
Official Magazine - UK
9



Royal grumble

WWE Legends Of Wrestlemania

'90s men struggle to cut it in 09

The first thing you need to do in Legends Of Wrestlemania is start a Battle Royal in any of the 15 brilliantly realised 'classic' Mania arenas. Pick Ultimate Warrior, Hulk Hogan, The Rock, Jake The Snake, Bret Hart and Shawn Michaels. Then marvel at the remarkable job Yuke's has done in bringing to life each superstar's ring entrance, complete with correct music, logos, and introduction from legendary announcer Howard Finkel. It's a magnificent reminder of just how great wrestling was in the early '90s. And it's also the point where your love of LOW will peak.

Ring out

For all the hard work that's gone into successfully bringing the biggest, most colourful WWE/F superstars of the last two decades to your PS3, the matches themselves just don't live up to those grand entrances. Controls are mapped solely to the left stick and face buttons in an attempt to simplify things, but this turns every bout into a mess of punches, kicks and the occasional button-matching hold or reversal. Successfully nailing beginner moves opens up more powerful ones – but the gameplay is so repetitive and robotic that it's hard to care.



Info

Format: PS3 ETA Out now Pub THQ Dev Yuke's Players 1-4 Web snipurl.com/dq86h It's like Meeting your childhood heroes and realising they're idiots.



Hogan knows best, according to his TV show. So what's he doing in this game then?

Still, one mode prevents Legends Of Wrestlemania being banished to Wrestlecrap purgatory alongside Damien Demento, The Gobbledy Gooker and every Bra & Panties match ever, and it's Wrestlemania Tour. Here you watch extended video footage of historic matches and the build-up to them before playing those classics and scoring points for emulating specific events, like Warrior avoiding Hogan's legdrop then winning the world title at Wrestlemania VI. This box-ticking mechanic actually provides welcome ebb and flow to bouts, and makes Legends playable, if only for the duration of the 19 matches you get to re-enact. **Ben Wilson**



PlayList

Essential tunes to download this month

Lady Sovereign So Human

Format Track ETA Out now Price £0.79

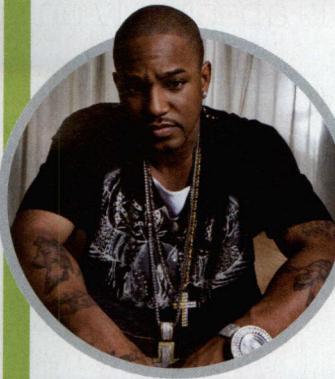
Pint-sized grime rascal given the thumbs-up by Jay-Z and Gwen Stefani bounces back with this, a charismatic day-glo pop bounce chock-full of wisecracks that steals liberally from The Cure's Close To Me. Sov's second album, Jigsaw, follows on 13 April. myspace.com/ladysovereign



Yeah Yeah Yeahs It's Blitz

Format Album ETA Out now Price £8.95

Karen O and chaps return with their third LP, sexier than ever (in an icy kind of way), toning down the spiky guitars in favour of disco drums and the sort of one-finger keyboard riffs not seen since Gary Numan drove around the stage in his Sinclair C5. myspace.com/yeahyeahyeahs



Cam'ron Crime Pays

Format Album ETA 21 April Price £7.99

Formerly a rap moneybags who prowled the streets of Harlem in a pink Range Rover, Crime Pays sees Cam'ron taking the pulse of the nation and getting with the 'economic depression': see lead-off single I Hate My Job – wage-slave tales set to hard-done-by soul tunes. myspace.com/cameron

Download of the month Bat For Lashes Two Suns

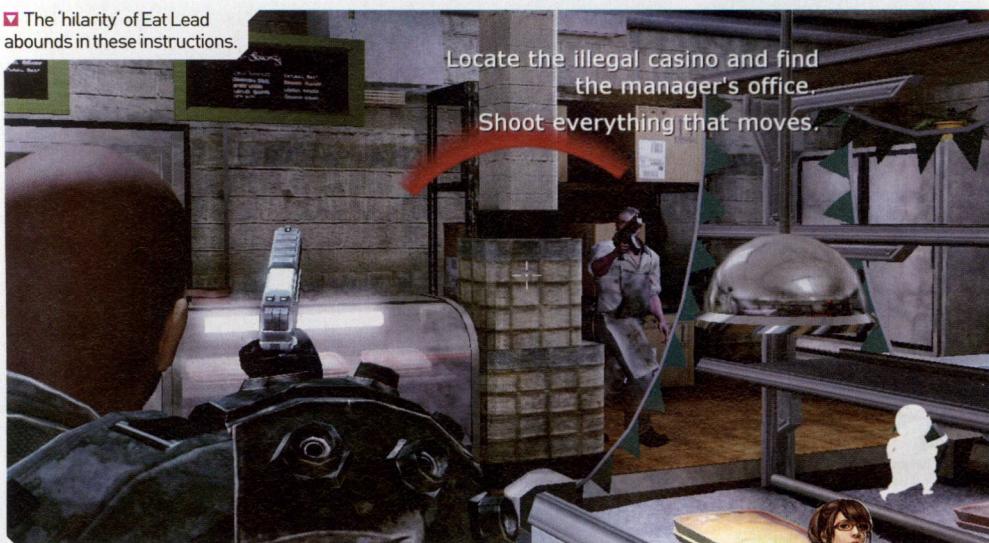
Format Album ETA Out now Price £7.99

If the first album from Brighton's Natasha Khan was a mite Top Shop Kate Bush, Two Suns sees her strike out on her own path, a whirl of gothic balladry, baroque disco and dreamscape gibberish that more or less lives up to its pretensions (which, to be fair, are considerable).

myspace.com/batforlashes



▀ The 'hilarity' of Eat Lead abounds in these instructions.



Tearful clown

Eat Lead The Return Of Matt Hazard

Buy it and the joke is absolutely on you

If you're aiming to get laughs by poking fun at gaming clichés, you'd better be damn sure your own gameplay is good. *Brilliant*, in fact. Eat Lead: The Return Of Matt Hazard isn't. It's actually worse than almost everything it attempts to send up.

The story follows washed-up videogame character Matt Hazard, a bland, stereotypical, catchphrase-spouting tool whose career – according to the half-cocked postmodern plot – has been ruined by his appearance in a string of awful games. The irony is, of course, that Eat Lead is exactly the kind of tripe that would have earned him his P45 in the first place.

The core of Eat Lead is its cover mechanic. It's a stock example of stop 'n' pop except for the fact that you can select



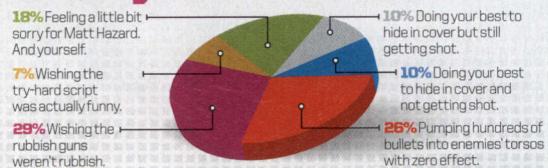
areas to dash to automatically, then shoot as you're conveyor-belted along. It's a brief novelty, ruined by the fact that the otherwise braindead AI enemies have been given the hugely frustrating ability to spawn behind you.

It doesn't help that none of the guns have any hint of a kick to them. The Hazard Pistol (ho ho) feels like a popgun, the machine gun is limp, and deadly water pistols make an okay joke but a boring weapon. There's a tiny bit more oomph to the shotgun and grenade launcher, but nothing to make the Earth move. There's also no aim assistance, which makes blasting away at the bad guys a frustrating mix of wildly swinging the screen around to find an enemy before trying to target them at a jarringly slower speed. A messy combination, then. But wait, it gets worse...

Toxic waste

What we've mentioned so far is the *good* stuff. There's basically little to recommend on any level elsewhere. The highlights reel of what goes wrong

What you do in... Eat Lead



▀ "We all live in an improbable submarine, we shoot out of the top, and string's holding us up."



▀ In this exciting sniper section, identikit enemies continually run into identical positions.



▀ The gushing blue spray near the crotch is supposed to be pixels, but we know the truth.

includes shockingly bad boss fights, tedious button-matching mini-games, repetitive enemies, terrible close combat, a sine wave difficulty curve that varies constantly between super easy and rock hard without warning. And, to wrap the whole sorry mess up, there's crippling slowdown and the excruciating script, which is less 'zing!' and more an extended cry for help.

This might be why, against all the odds, it's impossible to truly hate Matt Hazard. He's every Z-list hero you've ever played as. He isn't Solid Snake or Nathan Drake, he's Jet Brody, Shane Carpenter, and every other genero-man with a less than unique selling point. But because he's such a failure, and his game is so crushingly poor, there's a tiny smudge of tragedy here: a great character would

rise above the sea of conventions and mediocrity that Eat Lead tries to ridicule, but Matt Hazard sinks like a stone. Which isn't any kind of compensation for actually playing the damn thing, but is, you know, quite funny. **Rich Stanton**





Download the Watchmen game and your friends will recoil as pictured here.

Pantomime villain

Watchmen The End Is Nigh

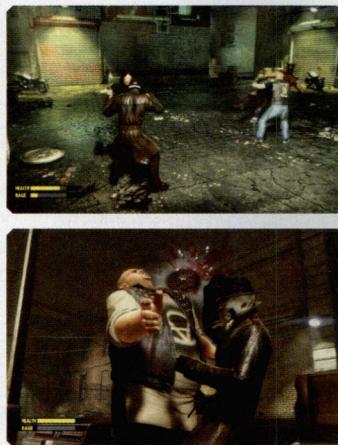
Actually, it *is* the end of the world

It is as if we are freshly hatched birds looking up with our mouths open waiting for Hollywood to feed us more regurgitated worms," said Alan Moore, writer of the Watchmen comic, about the film adaptation. "I for one am sick of worms." And it seems fair to say he isn't going to like the taste of this much either. The End Is Nigh takes Moore's smart, inventive, heavily politicised work and reduces it to a scrolling beat-'em-up, the idiot prince of gaming genres. Playing as either Nite Owl II or Rorschach in a '70s-set prequel, you have to light attack/heavy attack/throw your way past a conveyor belt of bearded punchbags.

It's hopelessly weak, even for a film tie-in. The combat is woolly busywork, with an anaemic selection of combos and unconvincing collision detection. The puzzles aren't fit for purpose (hey, Splinter Cell called – it wants its lockpick back) and the visuals – oddly pleasing cape physics aside – are full of jaggies and appear to use textures that were bought at a PS2 fire sale. At one point I thought I'd doubled back on myself only to find that an earlier room had simply been copy and pasted. The best you can say for The End Is Nigh is that the cut-scenes look okay. And so they bloody well should, with the comic's lovely artwork to trace.

Info

Format PSN download ETA Out Now Pub Warner Bros Dev Deadline Games Players 1-2 Web enjur.com/e7wt It's like Putting out a burning pile of comics with your tears.



Forget how Rorschach rocks, this will only sully your memory of the tiny psycho.

In a game that's only two hours long, being this gnawingly repetitive is actually quite an achievement. And incredibly, this is just the first instalment – there's another episode on the way. Well not if we have our way. At the time of writing,

LittleBigPlanet was widely available online for £12.99, which is the exact same price as this. Some decisions are easy: no worms for us, thanks.

Tim Clark



Straight to bargain bin

With Nathan Ditum



There must be an enormous weight of sadness attached to making a game like **X-Blades**. Do they literally all sit down and discuss how they're trying to make a cheaper, sluttier and more orange version of Devil May Cry, or is it something that just happens organically along the way? Given the massive similarities – black smoke, demons, guns, those weird jumps where you can sort of float in the air if you press attack quick enough – I'm going to say it's deliberate, unless you count badly drawn boobs with hair-trigger wobbling as evidence of substantial original thought. Kids receiving this for Christmas or birthdays will feel much the same as I did when I got Go Bots one year instead of Transformers – a weird mix of obvious disappointment but also squirmy guilt because you know your parents tried their best, but they just don't really understand anymore. In sum: total wang. And why the hell is it all so orange?

I get that King Of Fighters might at one point have been a pretty good beat-'em-up, if only because people on internet forums keep aggressively insisting upon it. But that doesn't explain the logic behind throwing five consecutive versions of the same game onto a single UMD, like **The King Of Fighters Collection: The Orochi Saga** does. The whole point is

that it's supposed to be getting better each year, right? So explain to me why the hell I shouldn't just skip to the end and play King Of Fighters '98, rather than wading through '94, '95, '96 and '97? It's a trick question: I shouldn't play any of them, because they're all dated and crippling to play on PSP, and anyone who 'goes retro' in the age of Street Fighter IV is a certifiable lunatic.



Here's a confession you didn't ask to hear: most months, when I finally stop putting off playing the games for this column, there's a moment – usually when I'm playing the blandest and most repetitive of the bunch – where I nearly fall asleep. This time it happened during **Ben 10: Alien Force**, and was particularly remarkable not only because I was up in the office instead of on the comfy sofa in the demo room (mmmm, sleepy demo room) but because I was also playing co-op with Tim at the time. Not that our game lasted long – Ben 10 is offensively low-res, ugly like an empty eye socket and has a very small pool of idiotically simple combos. Barely even worth sleeping through.

Abomination of the month

PlayStation 2

SECRET SERVICE



What the hell is this? Being in the secret service is about wearing shades, jumping in front of world leaders in slo-mo and being able to beat up everyone in the world. It is not, as Activision's shameful **Secret Service** would have me believe, about failing to spot several would-be assassins milling around the Lincoln Memorial all wearing identical orange camo vests that make them look like Marty McFly in Back To The Future, and then letting the president get shot. It's outrageous. Aiming feels like wrestling with a rusty anti-aircraft turret, textures are so low-res they make my eyes ache from trying to focus, and the script struggles not only with grammar but with the basics of making meaning from words.



Gruff rider

Wheelman

Can you handle the ratio of guilt to pleasure?



Imagine Vin Diesel's morning routine. Gargle a palmful of oil and sand, continue the ongoing lobotomy process that prevents emotions from ever finding their way into his acting voice, and read the dozens of fan letters he wrote to himself before going to bed. Then it's off to Tigon Studios, where he spends the day telling the artist to make his tits bigger. Probably.

Seriously, his tits are really big. Or rather, the tits of the character he plays and you control are really big – one Milo Burik (a name which, coincidentally, shares the same rhythm, and a lot of the same letters, as Niko Bellic). New to an underpopulated version of Barcelona, you quickly fall into a series of tutorial missions that introduce you to the main themes of the game, and start unlocking the moves that make *Wheelman* surprisingly enjoyable.

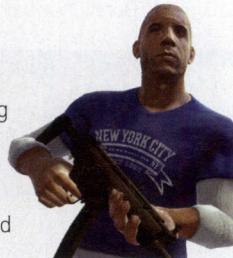
It's a familiar enough setup – a combination of gang factions, driving and

DevTalk



"If it works on PS3 it'll work on 360. [Developing] is harder on PS3. 360 is like a dumb PC."

Shaun Himmerick
Executive producer,
Midway Games



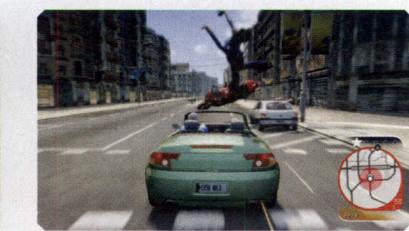
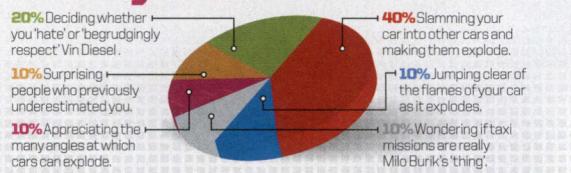
foot missions, but *Wheelman* takes the driving section to an absurd level of arcade action. There's no trace of realism, here – it almost comes as a shock that telephone booths don't explode when you drive into them. Especially since you can use the right stick to slam your car sideways into other cars (in total defiance of physics), and 'airjack' new cars by leaping through the air at suicidal speeds from your own. The idea was first tried in *Pursuit Force*, but here it feels triumphantly mad.

Hitting a stunt ramp will trigger a cinematic camera angle, which is a common enough trick, but destroying an enemy car does the same thing, and you'll often find yourself laughing at the sheer action movie-ness of it all. This overpowered sense of dumb excellence reaches its pinnacle in the Cyclone move, in which you can use the brakes to flip your vehicle 180° while shooting people behind you in bullet-time.

Mission control

There's a decent range of side-missions to take on around the town. Inexplicable taxi rides, demolition derbies, races and escaping the police all break up the game's main

What you do in... *Wheelman*



She'll be okay. Probably. Landing looked soft. Yeah, I'll keep going, check the news later.



The shooting is mostly limited to tight corridors and tunnel spaces with lots of cover.



Driving on the pavements in Barcelona is fine, because apparently only seven people live there.



Info

Format PS3 **ETA** Out now **Pub** Ubisoft **Dev** Midway Newcastle/
Tigon **Players** 1 **Website** wheelman.game.com/uk **It's like** Dancing to awful music all night and surprising yourself by having a great time.

story, and chaining successful missions will give you an in-game bonus. The main problem is that *Wheelman* feels like a one-trick pony. The foot missions are undeveloped, and while Barcelona looks superficially summery, it's clearly designed to fly by at high speeds. Low-res textures and a weird lack of people make the beautiful Catalonian capital feel like a meticulously prepared but disused film set.

Then there's Milo. It'd be easier to stomach Vin Diesel's surly amoral anti-hero schtick if you thought he could do anything else. As it stands, he's a detriment to a game that deserves to be more fun. *Wheelman* is certainly good

enough to be worth a few hours of your time. It's a lot like zorbing – it's an eye-catching spectacle, and it looks like a lot of fun, but ultimately all you're doing is rolling down a hill in a massive plastic ball. Or car. Whatever. **Jon Blyth**



▼ "You can open your eyes now, James. They've all exploded."



▼ Shoot bullets out of the air! Really slowly, a bit like an ammunition-based remake of Duck Hunt.



▼ Those red circles – top right – measure your explosive rounds. Which blow people up, like this.

Cheap shot

Wanted Weapons Of Fate

Some of the movie's action, none of the Angelina Jolie

One day a game of a film will be so good it'll get a six-page review. You don't need any futuristic binoculars to see that today is not that day. What's almost as amazing to contemplate, however, is the fact that *Wanted: Weapons Of Fate* is not that bad. Some of the time. To a degree. In a way.

When it's working, this third-person action shooter provides chunky, undemanding, cover-based shooting in the familiar *Uncharted/Gears Of War* mould. The enemies are plentiful, the debris is flying and your moves are a mixture of arrogant flash and icy murderousness. Almost uniquely, it also provides great voice acting – some by the original cast, such as Terence Stamp and the rapper Common, and the rest by decent actors such as Peter Stormare (the shouty Euro character actor from *Constantine* and *The Brothers Grimm*). And, just to really twist your melon, it actually has some clever ideas.

Banana shot

Oh okay, it has two clever ideas. The first is to abandon the familiar progression of knife/pistol/shotgun etc, and instead leave you with handguns pretty much the whole time. It could be annoying, but instead it neatly throws the focus onto

Castlist

The hero



Wesley

A young drifter plucked from obscurity to become a super assassin.

The dad



Cross

Wesley's father who, like his son, can bend bullets and slow down time.

The boss



The Russian

Assassin hiding a clue to the location of a magical Loom, in his arm. Really.

your broadening skill-set. Mostly. From a regular start you become increasingly superhuman, bending shots around corners to bring enemies out into the open and sending swarms of exploding bullets towards unlucky victims. You also get a slo-mo dive and the ability to move so fast that suppressed enemies can't see you. This lets you flank tricky targets and shoot them in the arse.

The second clever idea is to combine quick-reaction events with real-time cut-scenes. For instance, at various points in the stand-out plunging airliner level, you watch your character clamber around only to find a gunman has appeared, a tight countdown has started and there's sweaty precision shooting to do. Five or six of these chained together create one increasingly tense sequence.

But when *Wanted: Weapons Of Fate* is not working, it's as rubbish as its own acronym (W:WoF!). Its out-of-scale levels are so filled with handy junk piles, barriers, boxes and crates that it's impossible to forget that they're (totally linear) mazes painted to look like real locations. In contrast, your aim is non-linear – it speeds up suddenly after a second or so, meaning it's either

Info

Format PS3 ETA Out now
Pub Warner Bros Dev Grin Players 1
Web thewanted.warnerbros.com
It's like The movie being remade by those guys in *Be Kind Rewind*.



sluggish or oversensitive whatever option you choose. There are hardly any enemy types so they repeat endlessly, while occasional suicidal knifemen are just a bog-standard quick-time event: hammer the \mathbb{O} button *really* fast or it's game over. Oh, fun! Similarly, the box-ticking emplaced gun sections are appalling – your abilities aren't really vital and it's practically impossible to know what's going on beyond the noise and fire and fog of bullets.

Trying to Woo

Perhaps worst of all, *Wanted* just doesn't progress after the first couple of hours. Still, when the sun of mindless shootery

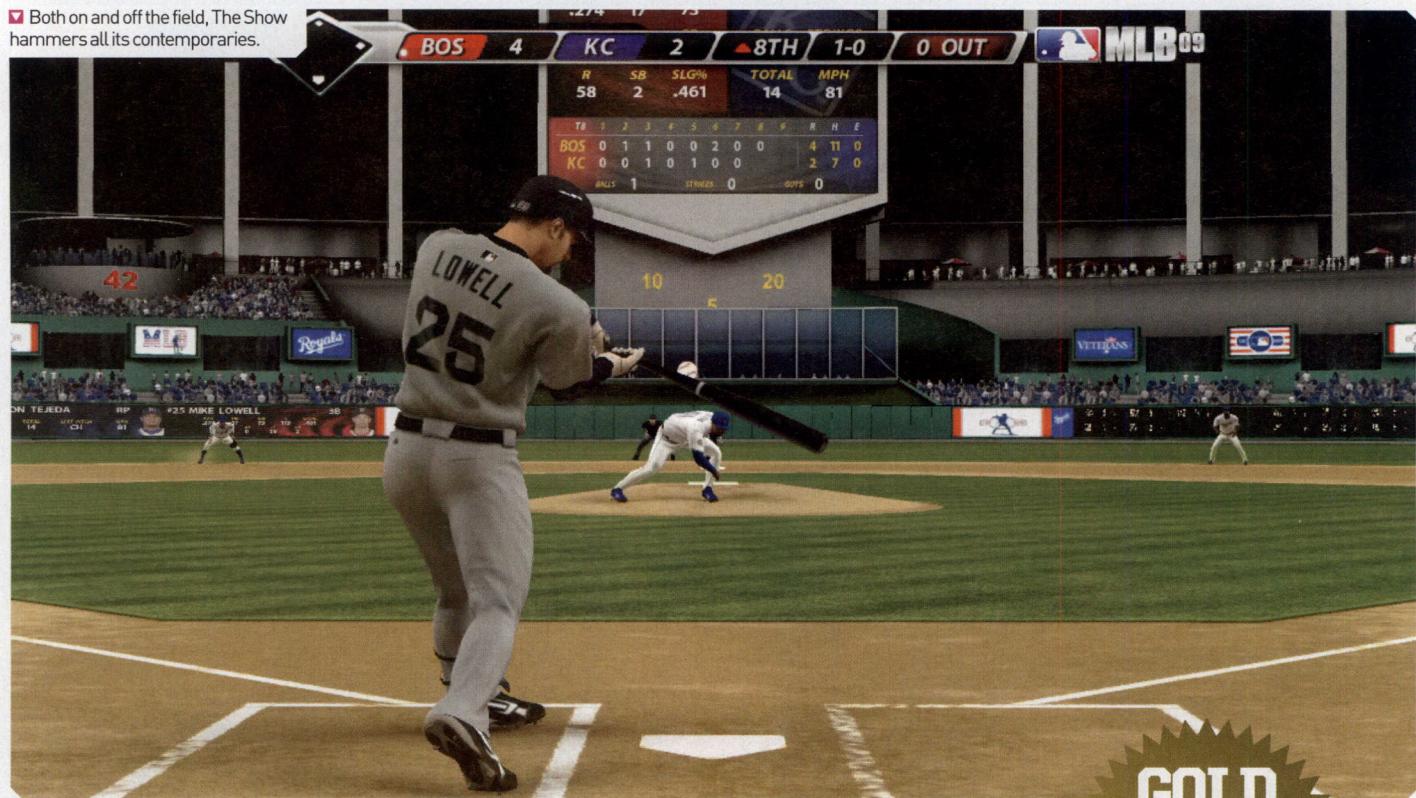
manages to break through the thick clouds of rushed development, it's almost as fun as John Woo's *Stranglehold*. And if that's not a half-hearted recommendation, we don't know what is.

Steve Williams

PlayStation®
Official Magazine - UK

6

Both on and off the field, The Show hammers all its contemporaries.



Grand slam

106

MLB 09 The Show

That score is no mistake – all hail the undisputed king of sports

Last year's MLB 08: The Show came so close to perfectly encapsulating real baseball in videogame form that it was difficult to see how it could be improved upon. Batting, pitching, baserunning and fielding – the four critical basics of the sport – were all masterfully implemented, with a plethora of difficulty settings and optional assists ensuring that anyone could pick it up, play it, and then spend the following 12 months failing to put it down.

Bat's amazing

So how has developer SCEA San Diego set about improving upon something so close to faultless? Well, it's sensibly shied away from tampering heavily with those fundamentals, but over 1000 new animations go a long way towards keeping things constantly fresh. The most noticeable tweak is, instead of always running in straight lines, AI fielders now take 'human' paths, constantly assessing the best angle to stop an infield drive or catch a hard fly ball, and sometimes misfielding as a

result. You really get the feeling that both team-mates and opposition can sense what's happening on every pitch in real time, and this tiny human element adds hugely to the already unparalleled realism. Plus it actually makes playing the AI more enjoyable (and realistic) than online opponents.

Even so, it must be hard to keep a sports game where a season lasts 162 games interesting, right? Nu-uh. The Show succeeds in doing this because of the astonishing effort put into replicating every tiny aspect of real baseball, so that even with constant play it simply never feels repetitive. I could spend pages listing every nuance and why they work so perfectly, but we don't want to scare the horses... so here's the highlights.

Imagine a sports game with dynamic lighting and weather systems, where overcast days actually feel grim and moody, and where evening matches start off with the sun casting late evening shadows over the field, then move gradually towards nightfall, the floodlights coming on in the 4th or 5th

Like this? Play these



NHL 09
The main contender to MLB's US sports crown, with brilliantly lifelike gameplay and a superb Be A Pro mode.
VERDICT 9



Madden NFL 09
EA's best American football effort in years. Only a disappointingly shallow Franchise mode holds it back.
VERDICT 8

GOLD AWARD

PlayStation®
Official Magazine - UK



Info

Format: PS3 ETA: US Import Pub: Sony Dev: SCEA San Diego Players: 1-2 Web: us.playstation.com/PS3/Games/MLB_09_The_Show It's like Real baseball. And amazingly so.

inning as darkness slowly descends. A game where fans dress according to the weather and heckle individual players, and vendors walk the aisles selling food and drinks. Where season ticket holders leave in the 7th inning if their team is getting hammered, or don't even bother to turn up in the first place 'cause you're bottom of the league. And now stop daydreaming. The Show has all those things, and much more besides.

It has the real mascots for every team in the major leagues, and a complete set of intricately detailed stadia with working scoreboards and jumbotrons that update stat overlays after every pitch. Its broadcast presentation is class leading, with a seemingly endless supply of fresh, relevant commentary, regular cut-scenes featuring managers, players and

■ Hit L3 in a replay to record it to the Video section of your XMB.

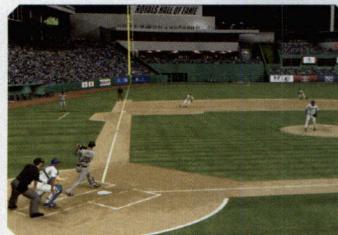


■ Roster updates go live weekly – so if Mark Teixeira leaves NY it'll be immediately replicated.

crowd doing all the things you see them do on TV (my favourites: seeing a pinch hitter step up and out of the dugout when called into the game, and a pitching coach giving a batter tips after he'd just struck out to a pitch in the dirt). And it has an end game highlights package that looks like something straight off ESPN.

Then there's real life umpire crews with specific personalities (like calling a tight or loose strike zone), and the ability to assign a user-defined portion of any song on your hard drive as a batter's walk-up or home run theme. Plus there's an even more colossal Franchise mode than before, with the addition of 40-man rosters, waivers, the Rule 5 draft and arbitration. If those words look like they're written in code, simply imagine playing season after season on FIFA or PES with the thousands of options found in PC's Football Manager series enhancing the experience.

Basically, if it's in



■ Hitting is slightly trickier, but this adds to the satisfaction of slamming one in the gap.

baseball, it's here. And that's why even with only delicate (but welcome) tweaks to the actual gameplay mechanics, this is indisputably the best sports game, on any format, of the past five years. It's the closest a videogame has ever come to making you feel like you're controlling pros, in real stadia, in front of genuine people, and it's astonishing. In short, any

sports fan should import it, now, but with a small warning: once you've fallen into the arms of The Show, no other sports game you own will ever feel quite the same again. **Ben Wilson**

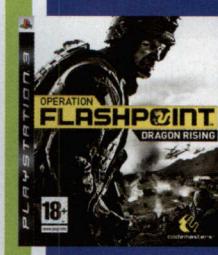


Release Schedule

Coming soon to a PlayStation near you

Publisher	ETA	Format
Koei	17 Apr	PS3
Sega	17 Apr	PSP
Sony	17 Apr	PS3
Atari	24 Apr	PS3
Konami	24 Apr	PS3
Koei	1 May	PSP
Activision	1 May	PS3
Activision	8 May	PS3/PS2
Codemasters	15 May	PS3
THQ	15 May	PS3
Eidos	29 May	PS3
Codemasters	29 May	PS3
Sega	29 May	PS3
Capcom	May	PS3
Capcom	May	PS3
THQ	12 Jun	PS3
Atari	19 Jun	Multi
EA	Jun	PS3
EA	Jun	PS3
Activision	Jun	PS3/PS2
Sony	Jun	PS3
Codemasters	Jun	PS3
Activision	Jun	PS3
Ubisoft	Jul	PS3
Deep Silver	Jul	PS3
Activision	Jul	PS3
Warner Bros	Jul	PSN
EA	Aug	Multi
EA	Aug	Multi
Take Two	Nov	PS3
Take Two	Nov	PS3
Namco Bandai	Dec	PS3
EA	Dec	PS3
Sony	Dec	PS3
Sony	Dec	PS3
Square Enix	2010	PS3
Sony	2010	PS3
SOE	2010	PS3

! All release dates are accurate at time of press but liable to change.

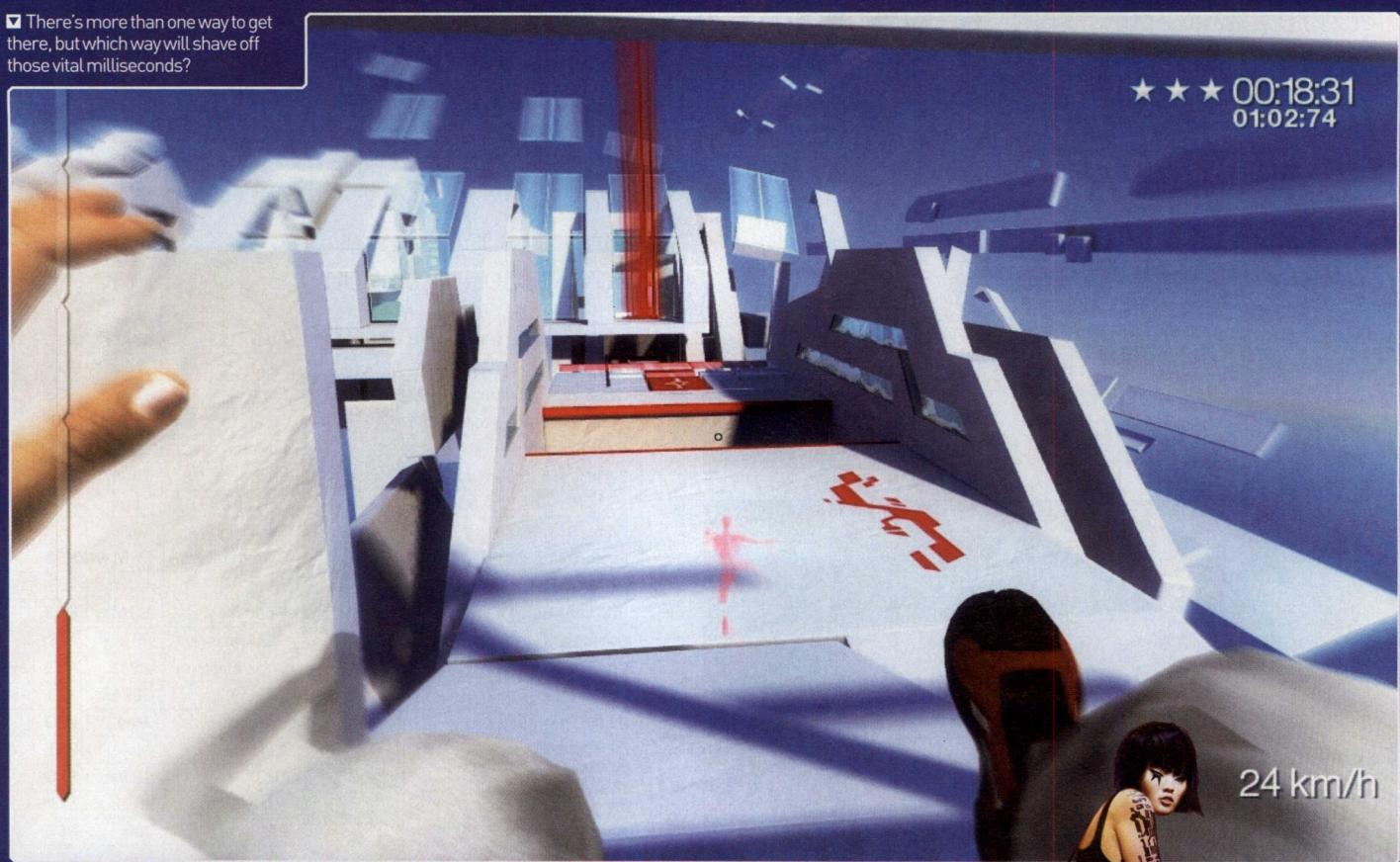


READY MADE EXCUSE #30

Pull a sickie for... Operation Flashpoint

It was sunny at the weekend so I set up my PS3 in the garden. Yeah, the weather *did* turn suddenly. Doc says my heart stopped for six minutes.

There's more than one way to get there, but which way will shave off those vital milliseconds?



108 Faith on trial

Mirror's Edge

And you thought it was frustrating in single-player?



Info

Format PS3 ETA Out now! Pub EA Dev DICE Players 1 Web ea.com/mirrorsegde It's like Starring in an edgy video for a techno protest song.

Finishing the story mode in Mirror's Edge is when real the challenge begins. You can complete that whole side of the game quite happily, without ever having to truly master Faith's controls. Sure, you'll need to pull off a couple of jump-turn-jumps every now and then, but for the most part there's enough time to look around and work out where to go next.

But if you want to master the Time Trial mode – and trouble the leaderboards that form the game's central online offering – that sort of relaxed attitude will only see you shamed. The trials take

place in unpopulated cut-out sections from the game's larger single-player levels, and the idea is simply to find the quickest route from one side to the other. Every clumsy grunt is a second lost, every time you dangle one-armed from a fence is a reason to restart from scratch. Unless you pull off a non-stop string of snazzy moves, you'll be sat unhappily at the bum-end of the leaderboard.

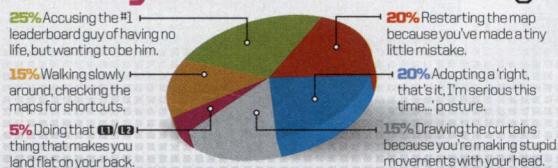
attention. I guess I must be some kind of natural then. Sorry."

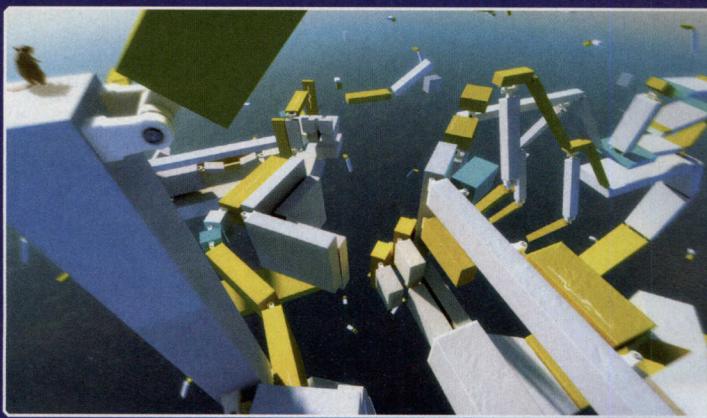
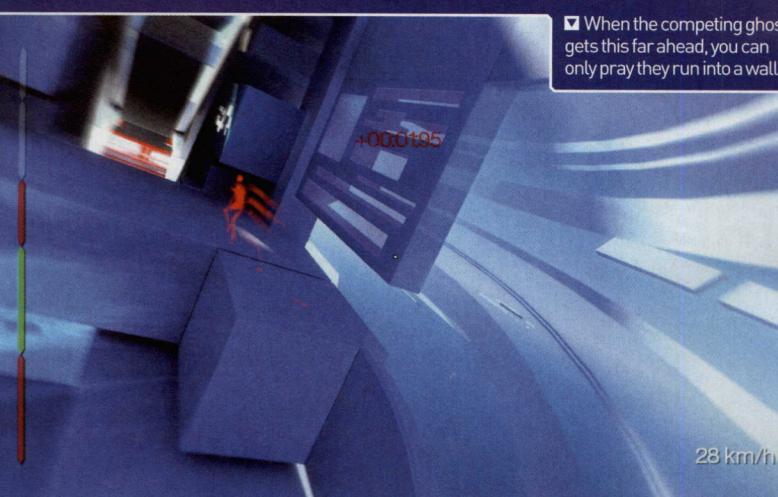
And if you need help leaping from your hard-earned single-star ranking (which in itself requires a fairly fault-free run) to the brutally exacting three-star standard, then you can play against the ghosts of other players. From the Time Trials menu, your options are limited – if you don't have any friends playing Mirror's Edge, you can only play against yourself, or the best person in the world. It's not insulting to suggest that maybe that's not the fairest match. But plunge into the leaderboards menu, select the 'centre on me' option and you'll have access to race against the ghosts of the people directly above and below your position. It's bad menu design (it's an unjustifiably long process to change the ghost you're racing against), but it's a great way to give yourself a reasonable challenge to improve your time. And more than that, it's an excellent way to find out some of

Member of the board

As online experiences go, Mirror's Edge isn't groundbreaking: there's no mode where 128 Faiths compete to climb the Leaning Tower of Pisa. But who needs to play at the same time as your friends when you've got the giant arcade cock-measuring contest of high scores? These scores, for instance, are the only way you can spend six hours trying to beat your friend's time, and then fake effortless modesty about it afterwards. "Oh, did I beat you? Really? I wasn't paying

What you do in... Mirror's Edge





It may look baffling but it's more intuitive to negotiate than it seems.

the tricks that people use to shave seconds off their score. For example, if you didn't know jumping was faster than running, then just watch the fastest ghosts. They never stop leaping about.

Free run

The Time Trials segment – arguably the strongest part of the game as it removes the inelegant combat and the less successful indoors segments – was given a recent boost with the Pure Time Trial Pack. While the main pack cost £6.29, the PS3-exclusive map was made available separately, as a free download. The new map pack runs with the game's theme of looking like a toothpaste commercial. But now, those gorgeous, stylised levels are set in white space, and have been given the names of Lynx deodorants. Actino! Kinetic! Razzmatazz!

It's like EA is going for the complete bathroom crossover. Each map has its own dominant colour, just like the zones of the city that

you fought through in the story mode. With runner's vision disabled in these maps, other clues are given – walls that lead somewhere are marked with symbols, and those step-jumps that launch Faith improbably high are usually marked by a third colour ramp.

For such an abstract set of maps – these are playgrounds of blocks suspended in air – it's surprisingly intuitive. Although at £6.29, whether it's worth your money depends on exactly how much of a perfection-seeking obsessive you are. If you hunted all the stars in the main game's Time Trial mode, then the download will keep you twitching for a few evenings. Otherwise, it might take you just two or three hours to get one star on all the levels and you'll be done. And after that, you'll probably be keen to get back to not

being the best at other things in life. Take advantage of the free PS3 exclusive map – download that first, and judge for yourself if you want more of the same. **Jon Blyth**



When the competing ghost gets this far ahead, you can only pray they run into a wall.



Online round-up

With **Leon Hurley**



I'd forgotten how much fun **Warhawk** was. It's been ages since I've played and it's good to be back. You know how it is: you promise to keep in touch, things come up and the next thing you know six months have passed and... Look, I don't want to get into

your stupid jeep. Stop beeping the horn and following me. It's weird. I'm quite happy to just run around and shoot things a bit. You'd just drive about like a drunk, I'd be useless on the machine gun and we'd both get blown up by a tank because you got the car wedged in-between some trees. I'm going to have a go on this jet-pack, that'll be much... **BOOM!**

Oh God, **3-On-3 NHL Arcade** is like doing PE at school again. The urge to join in with the big kids mixed with a crippling lack of sporting ability. Is there some trick I don't get? Why am I getting pounded 10-0? I can barely get a shot on goal as I watch my little bobble-headed team stumble around the ice like puppies being shaken in a box. It isn't my fault. Whatever the gene is for athletic ability I must lack it utterly because this isn't just bad, this is anti-good – if I touched someone who is good, we'd explode as we cancelled each other out.



Saints Row 2's online mode was pretty average – some nice potential marred by a dodgy lobby. This new DLC, the Ultor Exposed pack, adds a little extra fun but not much. Porn actress Tera Patrick adds to her previous role as 'special producer' in charge

of... Oh God, let's not even go there. Anyway, she now appears as a new homiegirl to join your gang as you tackle the three shortish missions on offer here. More substantial additions include new rides like an attack plane and a possibly game-breaking missile-firing humvee straight out of the upcoming **Red Faction: Guerrilla**. You also get some new maps and extra co-op modes, like the one where you compete to rack up the most carnage. Plus – bam! – there's extra facial hair to customise your character. Shallow my ass.

Download of the month

I don't know how I missed the **Pixeljunk Eden Soundtrack** (£1.49) when it first hit the PlayStation Store in October last year. Probably because I was still furiously angry at the game's obscenely hard Trophy requirements – collect everything, miss nothing, do it a million times, that sort of thing. To be honest, I sort of blanked everything Pixeljunk out of my mind for a good few months after that. Anyway, turns out the soundtrack is amazing. Hypnotic minimal electro instrumentals full of interlocking loops and rhythms by Baiyon (baiyon.com) who also designed the visuals. I guess it could be classed as 'experimental' by people who are weak and fear the future.



Next month in...

PlayStation® Official Magazine - UK

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If the real Gunners played like us, Wenger would firesale the entire squad instantly.



OPM torn to shreds

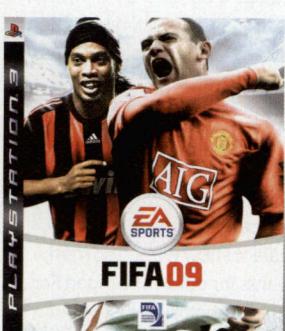
Beaten so badly the numbers make us ill

Look back through history and you'll find that all the *really* great sides suffered an enormous and humiliating setback before they finally got it together and took on the world. Probably. We hope so, anyway, because after last month's super-saddening 3-0 drubbing, this month saw team OPM sink even further into despair with a savage 7-0 defeat.

Post-match blame was passed about liberally. Nath pointed a finger at the rest of the team for leaving him stranded at the

back for long stretches, while everybody else suggested the defending itself was the issue. Phrases like 'part-timer', 'fat-handed manchild' and 'Titus Bramble' were hastily typed in what was a lively post-match dressing room.

Clearly, we need help. If you think you've got what it takes to bolster our flagging squad, or your existing team want to have a crack at us while we're down, then head on over to gamesradar.com/fifa09onlinechallenge and register your details. Please go easy on us though...



Sign up to play our FIFA 09 side now

gamesradar.com/fifa09onlinechallenge

mail@opm



Raging at Rockstar, the hunt for rugby, more Trophy whoring, Max Payne love, cross dressing and our very first OPM poem.

Game hunter

I've been through all the events and excitements that PlayStation has had to offer. I've loved every second of it, but never once have I found myself sweating over games into the early hours of the morning or getting so emotionally attached, not until I started hearing that 'ping' that happens when you get a Trophy! At first I was really confused (I thought I'd received an email or something) but soon it was personal if I didn't get one. And comparing your Trophies with mates was a great feeling.

From PlayStation hopes and fears to technical queries, this is the place to come for answers

Email us at opm@futurenet.com or write to Letters, OPM, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

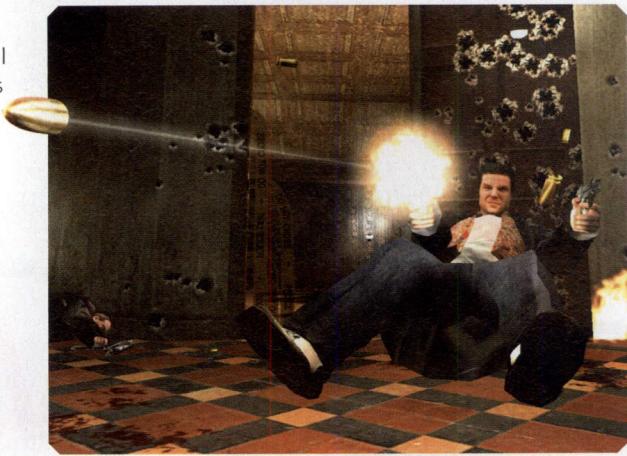
I think the Trophy system is one of the most effective ways to sell games ever – I wouldn't usually find myself buying loads of 'meh' games like Alone In The Dark: Inferno or Quantum Of Solace, but now I must, just because they have Trophies. I would love to see some sort of reward for this extra labour over games with Trophies, like if you reach a certain level in your Trophy collection you get some money to spend in the PlayStation store. Mind you, even if you don't get any reward, you still get the satisfaction of saying, "Well, I've got a platinum and you haven't," which wins any argument.

Chris Shirtcliffe, by email

Any argument? If only the judge in the Mills vs McCartney case had known. But yes, we're increasingly seeing sane gamers reduced to silverware-hungry wrecks. So when you find a friend playing Shellshock 2 for cups, you know it's time to stage an intervention.

Copped off

On reading your In The Mood For... Cops, while I agreed with most of your choices, I was a little upset over the exclusion of the baddest badass cop in videogame history. The man I mention is the one and only Max Payne. Leaving him out is like



Max Payne – the baddest cop in games.



Text OPM
Text 'Letters' then your message to 87474 – we'll include the best txts in the mag innit!*

Da Vinci leaving Jesus out of The Last Supper. The man had his wife and infant child killed minutes before he got home. He gets shot, blown up, and generally has hell thrown at him. Most videogame cops either keep a stiff upper lip or become everything they hate. The man gets shot 200 times, pops a bottle of aspirin, and then starts to mentally kick himself for having to kill the villain. Of all the cops you listed only Inspector Tequila comes close to Payne... and Tequila stole most of his moves from Max.

Derek, by email

Like the cynical, weary judges of a cheesy talent show we see so many contestants for our In The Mood For... pages that sometimes, just sometimes, a really good candidate gets lost among the dancing dogs and drag queens. Better luck next year Max.

Creative gentleman
I write to you to share a poem inspired by playing great shooters like Call Of Duty: World At War and Resistance: Fall Of Man and 2.

You charge at me with fear and hate,
Perhaps I shouldn't have shot your four-eyed mate.
You retaliate in turn, I have just

What's on my hard drive



Stewie Hitchcock,
By email

Music

Loads of Pendulum, Linkin Park, Vertical Horizon, a couple of random MGS sounds...

Photo

Holiday pics from Devon, MGO, and the Rocket Minions trip to London!



Video

Game trailers – GOWIII is immense! And videos of my large Noby Noby Boy.

Game

MGS4, SFIV, COD4, GTA IV, LBP, Fallout 3, Bioshock, tons more...

Friends

Loads of friends from my old sixth form, and an even larger amount from the OPM Facebook group.

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slain your lover,
I run, jump, try and find some cover.
A hailstorm of bullets, what pretty
colours I see,
I'll have to avoid the lasers
chasing after me.
Returning fire, I do what I can
and what I must,
Unorthodox at times, but
I do it with gusto.
Bang, shriek, wallop and thud,
The grenade goes off,
I shouldn't I could.
Down to one bullet, this won't
end in stalemate,
I look down the scope, can't
believe this is my fate.
Failed, reload.

David Rowley, by email

We get begging letters, correspondence from prison and a lot of Nigerian princes, but rarely do we get poetry. For raising the tone of the entire magazine, you win a year's free subscription to OPM.

Egg chaser

As the Six Nations are currently in full swing and my desire to play rugby is heightened (on my PS3 obviously – God forbid I actually run around, I might get hurt) I thought it was a good time to bring up the issue of a rugby game on PS3. I know there are plenty of other rugby fans, not just in the UK, but in Europe and obviously the southern hemisphere, who would snap up a new game, even if it was as lame and lazy an effort as EA Rugby 08! (Which was a bloody shambles EA – shame on you cashing in on the 07 World Cup!) I still find myself playing it because there's nothing else available!

Mark Collins, by email

Given that no-one on the English team seems to understand the rules, perhaps it's the sheer complexity that's holding videogame versions of Rugby back. That, and the fact the ear deformation technology just isn't up to it yet.

Damn them

I want to express my disappointment at Rockstar releasing the The Lost And Damned, the first of two DLC releases for Xbox 360 only. I understand that it's a business and Microsoft paid a lot of money for the exclusive, but what upsets me is that Grand Theft Auto was originally a PlayStation title and this release feels like a kick in the teeth to all



✓ If there's one thing PS3 needs it's more sport games.



Q Please can you tell me why the Go! Messenger service has been cancelled?

A Although Go! Messenger proved a popular concept – having achieved a significant number of registrations – it didn't quite gain the number of regular users that BT and SCEE were aiming for.

✓ Shall I compare thee to a... [BANG]



PlayStation owners. Without us Grand Theft Auto would probably not be the massive global brand that it is! I'm hoping that eventually we might see some extra content, but I hate the way Rockstar has ignored its original fan base. So, please Rockstar, if you do happen to stumble across this letter, try and remember who helped to get you where you are today.

Dave Scanlon, by email

No one wept louder and longer than us when we heard we wouldn't be getting to see that man's flaccid penis in The Lost And Damned. Whether it happens next year, or next decade, if the exclusive runs out and the DLC does appear on PlayStation, we'll be on it like white on rice.

Cross playing

Like many people I spent ages making my Home avatar look exactly like me. If I could change one thing about Home, it would be so that when you change gender it spawns the closest match possible to your male avatar. Then I could see my sexy self as a sexy she-me – I'd talk as male me through the headset, and female me through text chat, and then I could have a conversation with a girl that doesn't leave me with a throbbing red hand print on my cheek. Let's face it: we're all curious about these things deep down.

Matt McGrath, by email

That's what we like to call an inside thought, Matt. Luckily, this is a caring, sharing, hands across the genders kind of letters page, and it would be nothing without people like you willing to publish their darkest secrets in a national magazine aimed at gamers.



Off the Wall

Choice cuts from the OPM Facebook group

Sack smack

"What about a sackboy OPM team? Mini sack-Rachel and sack-Tim smacking the s*** out of each other, jumping about with weird expressions on their faces... It's how I imagine deadline week to be!"

Martyn Bowell

Noby Noby

"It looks like Tim Burton has attempted to rewrite The Very Hungry Caterpillar..."

Holly Cooper

More Noby

"...am I the only one to think this is full of innuendo? Check out those instructions – 'stretch BOY and make him bigger to make GIRL happy...'"

Jenivere Stunt

Show off

"I love waving my willy – and getting Trophies is pretty cool too!"

Kieran John Sofie

IP theft

"I once stole Resi 4's plot and mixed it with DMC characters to make a story for my English coursework!"

Steve James

Fighting fingers

"The only way I'd be able to successfully play Street Fighter would be if my mother had smoked while pregnant with me and I was born with deformed fingers."

Joe McLachlan

Send your questions to:
opm@futurenet.com

Jill Valentine

Resi Evil's resident hottie

Lara may have the décolletage and the short shorts, but if you're looking for the all-time greatest heroine on PlayStation, Resident Evil's Jill is a shoe-in. Cute as a Hello Kitty button and significantly more useful in a fight, her ability to stay one step ahead of the series' shambling zombie apocalypse is legendary. Tyrants, Nemeses, the roving eye and South American charms of Carlos Oliveira – Jill's taken all of them in her stride. Even almost certain death in Resi 5 doesn't seem to faze her much. Pretty, classy and capable? Jill, you had us at "zombie apocalypse".

Main mutants

Tyrant T-002

The first Tyrant's spinal column was exposed, meaning it could be easily picked off. Not so the stronger, meaner, T-002. Still, a rocket launcher to the face provides an effective workaround.



Zombie

Resi's loyal foot soldiers may have been trounced in complexity by other Umbrella nasties, but in numbers they're still formidable foes. Baggy being the one who gets his neck snapped by Jill's thighs in Resi 3...



Hunter Gamma

AKA The Frogger, this scaly bundle of ugly is one of Umbrella's first attempts at creating a bio-organic weapon from scratch (er, well done?). Its party trick? Swallowing Jill whole with a flick of its tongue.



Nemesis

Never before or since has an eight-foot mass of writhing tentacles, evil gristle and fugly malevolence looked so good in a leather jacket. Nemesis will always be remembered as Jill's ultimate, y'know, nemesis.



Horrific highlights



Infected

When Jill is infected with the T-virus during Resi 3 it looks like it's curtains... until she's rescued by ex-Umbrella Carlos Oliveira who fixes up a vaccine in time for some Roquefort-ripe dialogue.



Play dead

You never forget your first time – Jill's Resi nightmare starts when she's attacked by zombified Dobermans. She survives, but buddy Joseph Frost becomes a bloody footnote in the Resi canon.



#27
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Carlos Oliveira

An ex merc employed in the Umbrella Corporation's Biohazard Countermeasure Service, he's apparently unaware of his employer's poor safety record. Still, he gets wise just in time to save Jill and hit on her in every cut-scene. And we thought Nemesis was persistent...



Lt Mikhail Victor

Like Carlos, Mikhail was a member of the Biohazard Countermeasure Service and not your regular evil Umbrella man. Big Micky enters Resi 3 wounded and fails to make a full recovery, dying in a botched attempt to kill Nemesis with a grenade.



Albert Wesker

Captain of the STARS unit and Jill's commanding officer, his slicked back hairdo marked him out as an up and coming evildoer. Jill's seen this arrogant megalomaniac die twice, but thanks to veins brimming with G-virus variant, he has a habit of coming back for more.



Chris Redfield

Part of the STARS Alpha Team along with Jill, the Spencer Mansion incident saw the pair become founding members of the Anti-Umbrella Movement. After seeing Jill apparently die in a fight against Wesker, Chris continues the fight against the proliferation of bio-organic weapons.



Jill trivia



Jill's Sandwiches can be found in Dead Rising. It refers to Barry Burton in Resi after he saves Jill from being crushed: "You would've fit nicely into a sandwich!"



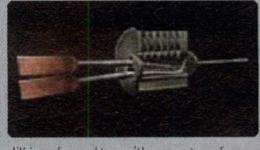
Sienna Guillory, who starred as Jill in the movie Resident Evil: Apocalypse, learned her movements by watching her virtual inspiration at work in Resident Evil 3.



Jill also stars in beat-'em-up, Marvel vs Capcom 2. Her special moves in the game include summoning zombie dogs and crows to attack her opponents, and a Hyper Combo that unleashes a Tyrant on them.



Canadian actress Catherine Disher, who voiced Jill in Resident Evil 3, also had a supporting role in legal drama T And T which starred none other than Mr T as an ex-boxer.



Jill is referred to as 'the master of unlocking'. She got her skills from her dad, Dick Valentine, who was a master thief – she used to be his accomplice.



Let the voting commence

Long-list voting for the world's premier games awards opens on 1st May 2009

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12+

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